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# ROUGH AND SMOOTH.

*A Tale of our Own Times.*

BY

LIEUT.-COLONEL R. D. CLEPHANE,

LATE OF THE SEVENTY-NINTH HIGHLANDERS.

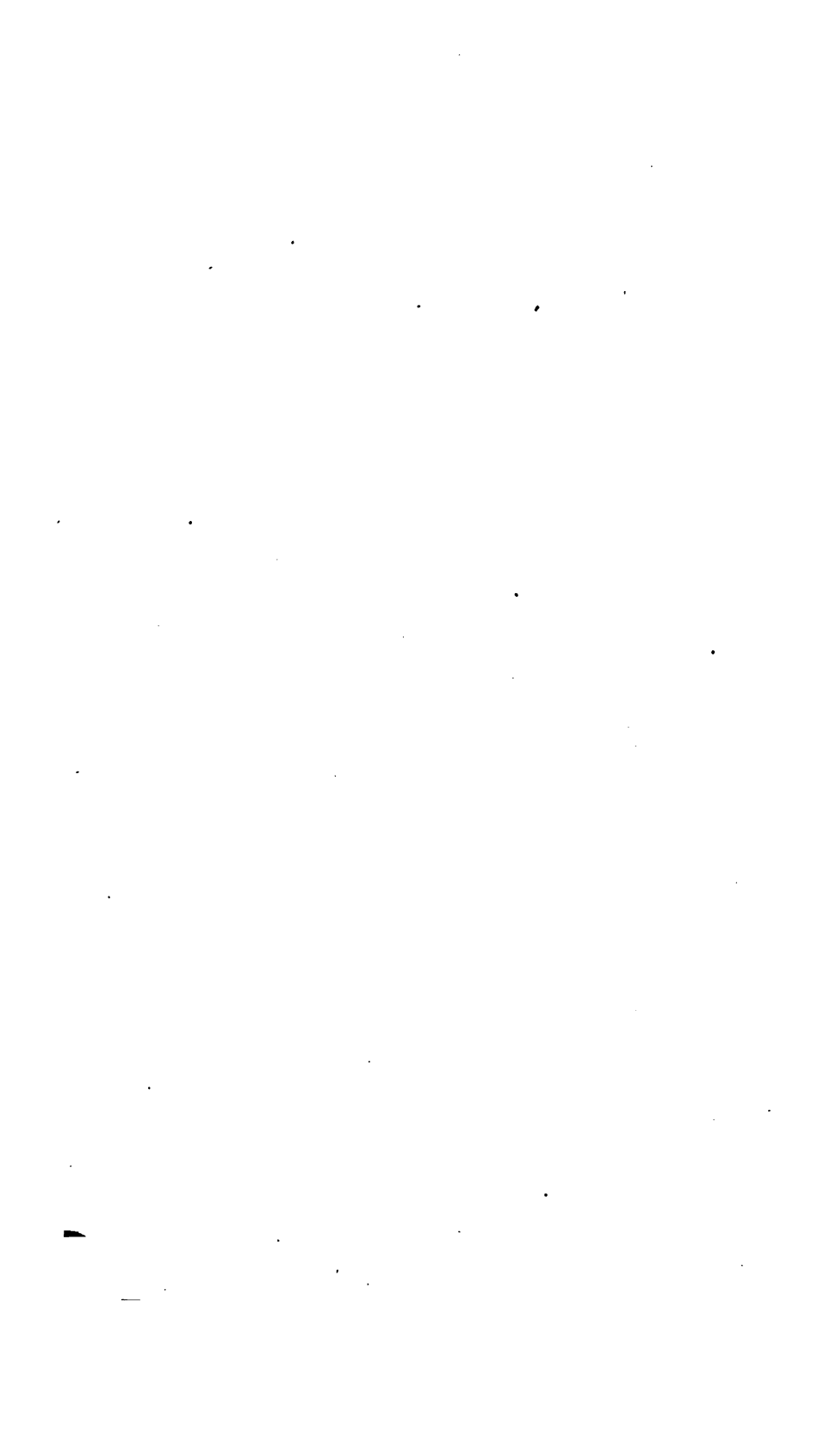
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## PREFACE.

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WE have no valid excuse to offer for our presumption in placing the following sketch before the public eye. We cannot even plead youth, excepting in the world of letters. Our narrative, indeed, was not originally destined for the ordeal of publication, but simply as a medium through which we might hold converse with certain old brother-campaigners. Accordingly, we are unable to account, even to ourselves, for the temerity which prompted an endeavour to extend its circulation. The immediate cause thereof may, however, be found in the encouragement liberally accorded by the gentleman who kindly undertook to peruse the MS. with a view to judging of its fitness for publication; and to him, whatever may be the result, our cordial acknowledgments are gratefully tendered. As for the moral which our pages may be supposed to contain,—a moral of some sort being conventionally looked upon as indispensable,—(though, were it so in fact, the Lord help the authors of two-thirds or thereabout of the gaudily-decorated volumes to be met with on the railway-stalls!) we lay claim to the setting forth, more or less, of two—one being

on the surface of our narrative, the other beneath it, though not so far, we trust, but that it may be discovered by a vision of average keenness. The first is simple, trite, and hackneyed ; very probably crudely worked out. It will be found in the mouth of one of our characters in the course of the story—Sandy Rutherford *loquitur*,—" Ill-gotten gear never thrive wi' them that got it." For the second, we are more fearful as to the manner in which it may be received ; more doubtful if it will be accepted at all, or, at all events, considered to be fairly illustrated by our pen. However, it is this—that, in the great dark mine of this world, there is no block of quartz so rough-grained and unpromising but may have its grains of precious metal hidden deep within,—in the garden, no nut, however ill-favoured of shell, but may be sweet and wholesome at the kernel. With regard to the former, brotherly-kindness is the only pickaxe which will break it open and disclose the treasure ; for the latter, that charity which is the best of the three heaven-born sisters can alone search through the rind. Without it, you may never become aware what lies within. When the fruit has ripened, and falls from the tree, it will be gathered up and stored away in a garner, which you, perchance, may not find quite easy of access. Therefore, *perpend*, O thou of the broad phylactery ! from thy well-cushioned pew in the front of the gallery, where thy demeanour is a matter of edification to all observers—except one or two—look down, and deem it not contamination to take by the hand yon publican in the obscurity of the dim aisle, whom you wonder to see there, and who half looks

as if he wondered thereat himself. He has no pew of his own; he does not come there regularly as you do; yet scorn not, good, pious, *respectable* man, to stand by his side in the spirit, (we would not have you actually quit those crimson cushions,) and to say *with* him,—*for* him, also, if you will,—“God be merciful to *us*, sinners.” You will go home to that family circle, within which you are looked up to as a shining light, a safer guide by far than you were in the morning.

Let us attempt to illustrate our meaning by one more figure. You are high up, we will say, on the ladder which the world sets to heaven's gate, and the *Pariah* is low down. But under what circumstances did you and he commence the ascent? Were *you* not placed half-way up, by the will of Providence inscrutable, at the very beginning of your career? Or, if not that, had you no helping hand? Reflect. Were not your young steps environed by good counsels, warning precepts, light ever shed upon pages which point out to all who look thereon the one true method by which to climb? O man! good, pious, and *respectable*, these precious gifts from on high were *the talents* intrusted to you at your birth. Have you indeed made your five *ten*? Or, are you on the fair way to that end? Hear this truth. If, falsely secure, you bend down your gaze to judge, and scoff at, or condemn the progress of your ragged brother with his half-talent, you are blindly trampling your own under foot.

But we started with the intention of inditing a preface, and lo! we find ourselves entangled in something not un-

like the commencement of a sermon. "*Parce, precor!*" we seem to hear on every side. "*Peccavimus;*" we have done with moralising, and, indeed, have said pretty nearly all we had to say.

But one word more in a slightly different strain, though to somewhat similar purpose. We are aware, O friend apostrophised above! that thou "art virtuous," but be not harsh in thought to him who sighs, "Woe's me for the dear old 'cakes and ale!'" Ah! the cakes of the present day have no plums or orange-peel; the ale may not be vended save under certain grim restrictions; and ginger seemeth no longer so "hot i' the mouth" as erst-while. Enough of that—"things must be as they may;" a glass of lemonade, waiter, and a half-hour's gossip, friends, of the good old days. What say you? Eleven o'clock—the house must be shut up? Well—well; don cloaks and mufflers, then, old clubmates, and let us go home to bed.

Dear readers, (we love that myth, and have dallied with it fondly throughout our book,) dear public, if the story we place before you be void of interest, it is not long; if our sketches of character offend any one, we humbly plead the "absence of malice," (though we confess to having studied here and there from the life;) finally, if we have mistaken our *metier*, say so roundly, and spare not, and we will sin no more.

## CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
ROUGE-ET-NOIR, . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II.	
"MERRIE" ENGLAND, . . . . .	13
CHAPTER III.	
LAW AND POLITICS, . . . . .	22
CHAPTER IV.	
MAUDESLEY HALL, . . . . .	40
CHAPTER V.	
CALPE, . . . . .	63
CHAPTER VI.	
OLD FRIENDS AND NEW, . . . . .	83
CHAPTER VII.	
A NIGHT AT MESS, . . . . .	94
CHAPTER VIII.	
TOM CLINTON, . . . . .	113

	PAGE
CHAPTER IX.	
MONKSHOOD VALE, . . . . .	135
CHAPTER X.	
THE GOOD GENIUS ARRIVES, . . . . .	148
CHAPTER XI.	
A STARTLING INCIDENT, . . . . .	164
CHAPTER XII.	
SIR RALPH'S STORY, . . . . .	201
CHAPTER XIII.	
FOLLOWING THE CLUE, . . . . .	235
CHAPTER XIV.	
TRIP TO MALAGA, . . . . .	252
CHAPTER XV.	
THORNFIELD'S NARRATIVE ENDED, . . . . .	283
CHAPTER XVI.	
MALAGA, . . . . .	294
CHAPTER XVII.	
THE "CORRIDA DE TOROS," . . . . .	321
CHAPTER XVIII.	
THE TORERO "AT HOME," . . . . .	341
CHAPTER XIX.	
BACK TO "THE ROCK," . . . . .	366
CHAPTER XX.	
WHO COMES THERE ? . . . . .	378



**CONTENTS.**

**xi**

**PAGE**

**CHAPTER XXI.**

**THE WILMOTS, . . . . . 390**

**CHAPTER XXII.**

**THE PLOT THICKENS, . . . . . 412**

**CHAPTER XXIII.**

**THE DENOUEMENT, . . . . . 423**

**CHAPTER XXIV.**

**DROP THE CURTAIN, . . . . . 454**



# ROUGH AND SMOOTH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ROUGE-ET-NOIR.

OUR drama opens in Paris; no bad locality for a sensation drama,—at least, we think so; and if any of our readers can suggest a better, let him do so in a becoming manner, and we will take it into consideration for our second edition.

The scene is a sufficiently lofty and spacious apartment, furnished plainly and substantially, and, in general, sparingly lighted up; but there is one brilliant lamp pendant in the centre, which is so managed, by dint of shades, as to throw nearly all the light of its several burners on a long narrow table covered with green cloth, which is placed exactly beneath it.

The time is about one hour after midnight; the *dramatis personæ* we shall now proceed to describe.

These are generally seated or standing round the table, and about two-thirds of them (they are not more than

twenty or thirty in number) apparently members of the same, or nearly the same class. They are to all seeming men of the higher ranks of society, though the effects of recent orgies, or the baleful excitement springing from their present occupation, (for the apartment above described is neither more nor less than a *salle-de-jeu*,) give a haggard and even savage look to many lineaments there disclosed, which, in their normal state, must have presented a far more pleasing appearance.

But there are some of a very different stamp, and they form a distinct group of their own, not mixing, except in the course of play, with the party first described. These last are chiefly men who have either never possessed, or have long forfeited, through the degradation consequent upon their own vices, any claim to the title of "gentleman." Looks of fawning sycophancy or of scowling malignity, according to their humour or habitual temperament,—a sort of half-military guise, less suggestive somehow of the *soldat* than of the *brigand*,—an indescribable something, conveying to honest men an impression of recklessness,—the recklessness of human life ;—all these combine to suggest the value in their company of light and elbow room.

Beyond this apartment, a pair of half-open folding-doors disclose an inner room. In this, which is much more richly and abundantly furnished, and is brightly illuminated, a group of figures, lounging on settees, discuss the bubbles of the day, and imbibe champagne. These are all of the class first mentioned, except one, and him we

shall briefly describe, as he may be considered to be the salient feature of the picture.

He is a short and somewhat corpulent individual of advanced years, with a shining bald head, shaggy white eyebrows, and whiskers of the same hue meeting under his chin. His equipment is full evening costume of somewhat exaggerated style, a diamond brooch of unusual dimensions glittering on the ruffled breast of his shirt, and a ring of the same costly description ostentatiously displayed on the fat little finger of his gloved right hand. His eyes are small, keen, and restless, like those of a ferret, his complexion blotched and unwholesome, and his thick, protruding lips are of a livid, purple hue. This man has a smile, a pat on the shoulder, (which commonly makes the receiver of the attention wince,) a vile anecdote or coarse *bon mot* for each of his companions or guests in turn; but amid all this, it is observable that his eye never wanders for many seconds from the entrance-door of the outer chamber.

Such is the *soi-disant* Monsieur Antoine Duchatel, (his real name is Rattenheim,) proprietor of the establishment, half bill-discounter, half hell-keeper, whole scoundrel; suspected of being a Jew by birth, and known to be a rascal by nature, if not a felon by right.

At the centre of the gaming-table is seated a personage who, as the type of a class, deserves a few words of notice; indeed, we recommend our readers to observe him well.

He is spare, sallow, and broad in the shoulders, as also in the space about the basement of his skull, which has an

animal look, but is suggestive of physical strength. His eyes are small and of the lightest possible gray, and his nose appears to have met with an accident in his early youth. He is very well dressed,—in black, with linen of irreproachable texture and whiteness,—and wears expensive studs; but his hands are lean, muscular, and coarse; appear to have seen harder work in their day than the present, and are not in keeping with the rest of his *personnel*, at least in so far as his habiliments are concerned. He is the croupier, and, in the exercise of his *rôle*, appears to aim at wearing as little expression in his features as there is inflection in his tones. These last are only heard in the conventional "*Faites vos jeux, messieurs,*" &c., of his vocation.

And now, the picture of our opening scene being complete, we change the tense in which we have been writing.

On the present occasion, the observation, not only of the croupier, but of all present, including Monsieur Duchatel himself, became gradually concentrated upon one individual. This was a young man, whose flushed cheek and unnaturally-brilliant eye, not to mention the thickened utterance with which he kept up a ceaseless chatter *à la mode Française*, addressed to no one in particular, indicated a too free indulgence in the pleasures of the *après-dîner*, before seeking an outlet for his spurious excitement in the fascinations of play. There was, however, a fresh, youthful appearance about him, a sort of boyish hilarity, far different from the haggard emotion visible on the countenances of some of the *habitues*, whence might be inferred that his

present occupation was one only now and then engaged in as a pastime, not adopted as a pursuit. *He* also was dressed in evening costume, and in the very height of fashion,—too pointedly so to be in perfect taste, or to denote one who moved habitually, or by right of position, in the exclusive circles of the *beau monde*. He appeared to be an aristocrat of the coffer rather than of the *sang pur*, and his countenance, round, good-humoured, and unmeaning, gave strength on the whole to this surmise. A very slight fair moustache shaded his rather long upper lip, and a diminutive tuft of the same complexion adorned his unobtrusive chin.

Upon him, such as he was, the fickle goddess seemed, for this night at least, disposed to lavish her wildest excess of favour. He certainly tried her constancy too, for he was playing with a most reckless disregard of system and calculation, so much so as to amaze the *habitués* looking on with card and pencil; but the deity had taken her whim of the evening to heart, and never swerved from its prosecution. The pile of gold and notes before the fortunate youth became enormous.

The sidelong, sinister regards of the croupier began furtively to seek those of his superior, from time to time. The latter, who now emerged from the inner apartment, followed by the rest, "made no sign;" but, as the losses of the *banque* became less and less retrievable in the waning hours, he would now and then involuntarily compress his lip, leaving the marks of his teeth, white and livid, on the surface. The savage-looking *habitués* whispered darkly

together, and muttered half-audible oaths of wonder and envy. The better-dressed party, none of whom, however, seemed to be on intimate terms with the lucky player, smoked, chattered, and grinned at Monsieur Duchatel; occasionally hazarding a few pieces, as if in hopes of sharing in the former's wondrous run of fortune, but only with various and minor degrees of success.

The worthy proprietor of the *salle* had stopped some time before, in the very middle of a vicious anecdote, and was now looking on with an expression which his features could on occasion assume, and which somehow lent force to the suspicions afloat as to his genealogy.

One individual there was, as yet unspecified, who had hitherto maintained a position in the dim background. This was a man who kept his countenance shrouded in the folds of a brown Spanish cloak, and who, having hazarded and lost an insignificant sum in the earlier part of the evening, had apparently resigned himself in disgust or bareness of pocket to the post of spectator. He seemed not unknown to the croupier, who, however, had betrayed no consciousness of his presence after the slight glance and nod of intelligence with which he had received him on his entrance some hours before. One remarkable feature was accidentally disclosed to view, though attracting little notice, if any, from that assemblage, whose attention was fully occupied by passing events, and who would probably never have given it a second glance, even had it been more worthy of observation than it was. Turning hastily to satisfy himself as to the amount raked in at one *coup*



by the lucky gambler, his slouched hat was struck off by the projecting branch of an empty chandelier, and fell to the ground, disclosing for one moment the fact that his right ear was cut off close by the cheek. This was the more apparent from his hair being cut very short, and from the absence of any whisker, which might have concealed the mutilation. With a muttered oath, he stooped hastily, replaced his hat, drew the collar of his cloak once more high up on his visage, and resumed his seat; removing himself, however, from the locality of the trifling inconvenience which had discomposed him. The youthful stranger's fortune was fast approaching its culminating point. Not that it shewed any symptoms of turning, but—the *banque* had very nearly approached the limit of its resources.

With a laugh of exultation the favoured individual swept up a vast pile of mixed gold and notes, which lay before him. "There will not be much more play to-night, messieurs," said he gaily, while his fingers dallied carelessly with a handful of the above heap; "*à présent—voilà—encore je mis*"——

Mons. Duchatel, who had been intently listening apart for a few seconds, placed his hand upon the arm of the player—

"Hist!"

A low muffled sound, like measured strokes upon a drum, was heard for an instant.

"Where, and what the devil is that?"

"*Les gens d'armes!*"

The scene that ensued almost baffles description. There was a rush on the part of most of those who had nothing staked, for a private mode of egress well known to them. The few who had placed money on the table scrambled to gather it up. The lucky one, looking bewildered, after a few moments' blank survey, flung himself upon the pile of his winnings like a brood hen in presence of the kite; while Mons. Duchatel, with more agility than could have been expected from him, sprung upon the table to extinguish the lamp; this, however, was a matter of more than one instant. The croupier now, after one hurried glance around, which shewed him the assemblage crowding through the inner door in which direction lay the private entrance, moved silently to the side of the great winner, who was endeavouring to stow away his money upon divers parts of his person.

"Let me assist monsieur," whispered the former.

"*Non ! non !—sacré ! non !*" sputtered the object of his civility, who was scattering gold in every direction, though certainly without any benevolent purpose. The croupier placed his hand upon his arm with a grasp firm yet hesitating. Mons. Duchatel fumbled and cursed in the endeavour to produce darkness; but he paused to give one look downwards to what was going on at the table. *Ma foi*, Mons. Duchatel, your countenance in mirth is not pleasant!

At this moment, while the young *bourgeois* was gazing with something between stupefaction and terror on the sinister lineaments of the croupier, the man in the brown

cloak moved hurriedly forward and spoke in the ear of the latter.

"*Non!*" said he in a grating whisper, "*pas de tout*; you are a fool."

The croupier grinned a smile, not inferior in point of expression to that of Mons. Duchatel. "*Bien!*" muttered he, edging back from the side of the lucky player. The man with the brown cloak took his place. Mons. Duchatel had succeeded in extinguishing all the lights but one. "*Vite, messieurs, vite!*" hissed he.

"Are you mad?" said the man in the cloak to the lucky one. "Do you not hear the police?—they are in the house; and the house is a den of thieves!"

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur!* what am I to do? I have lost—I do not know what I have lost—here, under the cursed table. Bah! it is dark—what to do? Assist me, monsieur; I will requite you well."

"Come, then—quick! Lost!—what signifies a few francs? Leave them to the *cochons* of police—*allons!*—I know the way. I will protect you from the brigands down below; you will need it, monsieur, I tell you. *Bon soir, Duchatel. Ne dérangez vous pas;—à la porte, monsieur—vite!—suivez-moi.*"

And half dragging the terrified young man, he with the cloak left the apartment by the private door.

The last flickering gleam of the dying lamp; it might be the play of the wavering light with its attendant fantastic shadows; that momentary gleam shewed two such ghastly countenances—those of the professional gamblers

now left alone together—as might have suggested the idea of Mammon holding converse with his secret ally, Murder.

From this we pass, by no abrupt transition, to that which was disclosed elsewhere—and not far off—by the dawn of day. White, rigid—the glazed eyeballs, but a few short hours since, and scarcely that, suffused with the hue of bacchanalian revelry, now wide open, fixed with sightless glare on the brightening gray vault of heaven—lay on its back, in a narrow by-street, the body of a well-dressed man. The dress was scarcely at all deranged; but the left side, just below the collar bone, was dabbled with blood; and on his matted fair locks, foul odours of kennel-refuse strove with the yet lingering scent of last night's perfumed unguents. The watch and jewelry, of which latter there was a good deal, were untouched, and there were a few francs only about his person.

He did not lie there long unsought or unidentified. *Ma foi!* Mons. Hippolyte Vinois, the rich young *bourgeois*, son of old Pierre Vinois, lately deceased, *bourgeois* also, but a miser and a millionaire to boot—here was a matter upon which, *en vérité*, *la Justice devait s'informer*, and her ministers might expect to be well requited for their pains.

*La Justice* did accordingly bestir herself, and so much to the purpose that Mons. Brelacq, of the *bureau de police*, in less than ten days afterwards, waiting upon Mons. Anastase Vinois, cousin, and successor to the property of the murdered youth, acquainted him that the affair was *joliment en train*, and that, with a trifling further

supply of "incentive," he had no doubt of the speedy success of their investigations. Mons. Anastase, who, by the death of his cousin, *ce pauvre Hippolyte*, had become most unexpectedly possessed of some millions of francs, (being himself an *épicier* in the *Rue Caillou Gris*,) did not shrug his shoulders more than half-a-dozen times in complying with this hint; and Mons. Brelacq was rarely known to fail in a matter whereinto he saw *reason* to throw the whole gigantic force of his marvellous talent.

Six months after the date of this episode, a gang of galley slaves were at their daily task in the harbour of Toulon. They were clearing out one of the docks, which was partly dry, and a baking sun drew forth from the slimy ground, on which they toiled knee-deep, and wrapped all round in its half-invisible folds, a pestilential miasma. There was a guard of soldiers over them, and the detachment of infantry furnished for this duty was composed of picked men; for this particular gang included *forçats* of the most dangerous sort, who had only indeed escaped with life from the tribunal of their fellow-men by virtue of "extenuating circumstances," the nature of which we leave it to French *justice* to explain.

The *sous-lieutenant* of the party, a square-built, powerful man, sat on a block of masonry, comfortably engaged with a short pipe, and conversed from time to time with one of the keepers of the gang.

"*Mon brave*," said he, after a pause, during which he had been attentively studying the physiognomy of one of

the convicts near at hand;—" *Mon brave*, you have foreigners, I perceive, in your troop?"

" *Et pourquoi non ?* " lazily demanded Jacques Dumas, plaiting his ample black beard into two separate tails. " You are sharp-sighted, and you are right, Mons. le Sous-lieutenant Jules Gaspard. You see we are not exclusive, *nous autres.* "

" *Ma foi*, I perceive it! Keep a sharp eye on that *gail-lard*, Jacques, my man! you will need it—*sacré nom de guerre.* "

" *Peste !* do not disturb yourself, lieutenant. But which of my children has the honour to attract your regards? "

" *Le voilà !* near the end of that log. One, two, three—bah! I lose count, and I cannot quite make out the number on his jacket. *Soixante—soixante—aha ! voyez*, he has but one ear; the right cheek is as smooth as my hand."

" *C'est ça*, Mons. Jules; *soixante-quatorze—un sacré Anglais.* "

" None the worse for that, perhaps,—and none the less worthy certainly of your special care, *mon camarade*," muttered the *sous-lieutenant*. " How long is his term? and his crime what? " continued he in a louder tone.

The keeper was tired of the subject. He yawned and stretched his large limbs. "*Soixante-quatorze*," said he, " is here for life; and his crime is murder! "

## CHAPTER II.

### "MERRIE" ENGLAND.

WE must now imagine an interval of ten years to have elapsed since the date of our last chapter, and transport ourselves in thought a brief journey—albeit sometimes troublesome when undertaken in the body—across the Channel. Unskilled in word-painting, let us nevertheless bespeak our reader's indulgence for a bungling attempt at portraying a scene which is impressed lovingly on our heart, though feebly transferred to canvas,—i.e., type,—a "stately English home."

On the rich clustering foliage of gnarled oaks, the deep green of spreading beeches, the yellow verdure of mossy turf, concealed here and there by a luxuriant carpet of red fern or gloomy gorse, shone with golden splendour the setting sun. All climes can boast their own peculiar beauties—who shall pronounce which most? The sunny, cheerful plains of France—the purple-brown Spanish mountains—the orange groves and deep-blue skies of the Mediterranean—the savage grandeur of the rocky Alps,—all possess charms which melt to tenderness the hearts of their sons, while inspiring wonder and delight in the heart of

the gazing stranger. Many an impatient listener to dull truisms from the pulpit; long-spun-out platitudes,—than which no surer stumblingblock exists to the searcher after the true spirit of religion—has, with rapt gaze upon the wondrous beauties of creation, acknowledged the hand and presence of their Divine Creator, thanked Him for their gift to man, and worshipped silently in his heart of hearts. Alas for the few—we believe them to be few—whose eyes wander idly, listlessly over such scenes, and who turn from them unmoved, taking refuge from weariness of the beautiful in devotion to the sensual! Our scene, however, is one familiar to most of us, even to those who have never assumed the courier-bag or travelling-knapsack, and who gather their impressions of foreign lands from the notes compiled by others gifted with more energy or leisure, and with the power to transcribe their ideas after a fashion fitted for the public eye. Once more, our scene is a very lovely one, (and here we are compelled to acknowledge one resemblance to the painter of old, who, doubtful of his powers of delineation, inscribed beneath each pictorial essay its appropriate designation, “This is a man,” “This is a cock,” and so forth;) and we must, we fear, after all our opening flourish, request our readers to take much of our assertion for granted. We are in a park which extends for a circumference of miles round a stately mansion, belonging to one of Britain’s fortunate sons,—a hereditary owner of broad lands and fat beeves. It is situated in a strictly rural district; no smoke of factories, no hum of busy commerce comes to break the ineffable charm of those



peaceful glades. The day had been intensely warm; but now the cool evening shadows were beginning to chase away, and to replace with sombre drapery, the cloak of rich warm haze that erstwhile had softened and mellowed the glorious scene.

On a sequestered path in one of the most retired glades of the park slowly sauntered along, not carelessly or with any appearance of enjoyment, two men,—that is to say, however, without any appearance of enjoyment as regarded one of them, whom we will denominate the *first* of the twain. In the eye of the other—and it was an expressive eye—sparkled frequent scintillations suggestive of mirth; and he wore, curiously enough, the air of feeling bound partly to conceal those ebullitions from his companion, while almost entirely indifferent as to success in the attempt. This companion of his was a man whose appearance and demeanour (with perhaps one exception, to be presently remarked upon) would not convey to an observer the idea of one open to ridicule—a man of rather imposing presence, a handsome man, of about the middle age, (we rather affect the indefinite range of that term,) and seemingly somewhat worn by habitual emotion of a severe nature, which had ploughed more furrows on his pale countenance than were attributable to time. But there was that in his gaze, unsteady and downcast,—that in the fidgety clasp of his restless fingers, now over each other, now upon some part of his dress,—which inevitably detracted from the otherwise rather dignified *tout-ensemble*, and even partly accounted for the somewhat flippant de-

meanour of his companion. He was dressed as an English gentleman of high position might be expected to be dressed,—that is, in a way which was not calculated to draw any observation whatever, which is rather more than could be said of him who conversed with him. Let us turn to *him*, and endeavour to convey some idea of *his personnel*; for being a very remarkable man, and a personage of no small importance in our story, it is fitting that he should be placed as clearly as we can manage it before our reader's mental vision. Not tall,—certainly not above the middle height, (we again choose to be indefinite,)—but prodigiously strong. A very Hercules of a man, and bearing about him indications of having put that strength to use in his country's service; as indeed he had without stint, and in other countries' service too; but of that anon. He was about the same age as the other, but not a single thread of silver betrayed its presence in his close-shorn, stiff, brown locks, or drooping, full, yellow moustache; and his bronzed cheek was closely shaven, after the fashion of a foreign land—that just across the Channel. Although there was something certainly, if dimly, conveying the impression of military occupation about his dress, it was difficult upon examination to analyse it. A loose blue over-coat, just edged with braid, shirt collar turned over a loosely-tied black kerchief, which surrounded a vast muscular throat, and a black wide-a-wake with a broad and flexible brim set jantly, and, as it were, defiantly, as regarded the world in general, on one side of his well-shaped head;—these might have been worn by almost any one without

suggesting anything in particular, except perhaps that the wearer was neither a parson nor a lawyer. But it was the air of the man,—his stride, firm and measured,—his glance, at times fierce, and always steady, which marked the soldier. He now pursued the conversation, the thread whereof had dropped, for his companion was evidently not inclined to be loquacious on the subject of discussion, whatever it was; and he himself had been busy lighting a meerschaum pipe, which now depended gracefully from beneath his moustache.

“So, you won’t have my story at any price?”

“How can you ask me to believe such a —— romance?”

“Truth is stranger than fiction; did you never hear that, Sir Ralph Maudesley? And if you don’t believe me, —puff, puff,—why not fight the matter, and have done with it, (this German tinder is trash!) eh? Your present course is expensive, baronet.”

“I tell you, man,—I beg your pardon, Captain Thornfield,—but you know well it is not on my own account that I wish to stifle this investigation, instead of dispersing the absurdity into thin air, by admitting the whole question to the light of day. My God! I sometimes wish,” said he, wringing his hands, “that I stood wifeless and childless—a lonely man on the earth! But I have those to consider who are dearer to me than life or wealth, ay, or—— or”——

“Honour,” quoth the man-at-arms, coolly, helping him out as he stammered and stopped short. “You are the best judge what you are inclined to sacrifice, Sir Ralph

Maudesley ; still it is passing strange that a matter should sit so lightly on your conscience—ay, yours—which has proved too galling for that of a coarse, reckless vagabond like myself !” Here the speaker endeavoured to assume a solemn look, as he puffed at his meerschaum ; but that eye would have betrayed him to any one less absorbed than his companion.

The former puffed on, and the latter gnawed his lip at this speech till the colour thereof rivalled in ashy gray that of his cheek. He then turned abruptly, and, halting, spoke with somewhat more of firmness (though his lip quivered) than he had hitherto displayed.

“Thornfield, you are a soldier—a brave one”——

“Humph,” interjected the other, *sotto voce*.

“Have you no compunction for addressing me, who have never injured you, in terms which, if applied to yourself, would prompt you to strike the speaker dead ?”

The soldier once more gave vent to his former ejaculation, but in a different tone ; and the expression of his countenance shewed that he was struck with the last remark and the manner of its delivery.

“I don’t know but you are right,” said he, meditatively. “Yes ; come—I shall bully you no further for this time. And I beg your pardon for that phrase, too. You are a gentleman,” (here a slight sneer once more altered the character of his glance ;) “and I have no right to talk so to one who has his hands tied, whoever may have wound the cords round and drawn the knot tight. So we preserve the *status quo*, eh ?”

"The matter remains as it has been, is, and will be."

Captain Thornfield laughed. "Make yourself happy your own way, baronet, if you prefer it to mine. Good-day to you—a long good-day; hug that reflection to your heart, Sir Ralph;" here he turned to depart, but after a few steps in advance, stopped and looked back. Sir Ralph Maudesley was still standing motionless on the spot where the colloquy had ended.

"By the by," called out the captain, "Wright and Thoroughpace have instructions as usual, I presume? Yes? All right! Fare-you-well—for a chicken-hearted son of a sea-cook," added he to himself, by way of addendum to his conventional good wishes.

Onward he now went, soon losing sight of his companion, through fern and underwood and straggling clumps of noble oak and beech trees, herds of fallow-deer ever and anon startled from their rest, a moment stopping to gaze on the intruder, then bounding deeper into the tangled recesses of the forest, to the verge of which ever and anon the path approached in its windings, while hares, rabbits, pheasants, and other game darted or stole across the green alleys in every direction. It was a scene to delight a poet or a sportsman. Captain Basil Thornfield was most certainly not the first. The latter he might have been in his day, when occasion served; but times had latterly been stirring, and for some years past his game had been his fellow-man. Not in one direction or in another, had his arms been turned as his country demanded; but whenever and wherever the tocsin sounded

throughout Europe, ay, or further still, there flashed the hireling sword of Basil Thornfield! Alas! that we should pen the word of one for whom we entertain no small regard, and for whose lot on earth we do not despair of drawing some measure of indulgent regret from our reader before we part. He now pursued his way, smoking as he went, in quite a facetious humour, winking as it were at the fern, and shaking his head waggishly at the ragged gorse bushes. The extent, as we have said, of the park was great. He had followed the half-obliterated pathway by which he took his way, as though well acquainted with the place, for a distance of about half a mile, ere he arrived at the wall of the demesne. A little further along was a gate, but our friend was none of those who allow themselves to be diverted from their straight course by any such obstacle as a deer-fence. Hoisting himself up to the top of the wall by arms which looked in their tremendous development as though they would burst the seams of his ample sleeves, he threw himself a couple of yards beyond, on to the road, whence he rebounded with the elasticity of an acrobat from a spring-board. Stray passengers looked back after him as he strode along, having answered his brief salutations courteously according to their class, for there was little chance of any one being bold enough, no matter what his humour, to tender rudeness to the owner of that frame. Verily, O bodily strength, thou art a precious gift; nor is it often that thou art abused, through the wisdom of Providence, which has in most cases

bestowed upon the possessors of thews and sinews, the blessing (to themselves and others) of a generous disposition. An hour's rapid walking, or less, brought our friend to a railway station, where, having seen him safely bestowed in a train for London, we bid him adieu for the present, and close this chapter.

## CHAPTER III.

### LAW AND POLITICS.

To a tyro in literature, which we confess ourselves to be, the first few chapters of a story form the main difficulty of the composition. It is necessary to collect the *dramatis personæ*, place them before the reader in an attitude alike graceful and, as it were, unstudied; but which shall nevertheless admit him to a certain degree of insight into their ostensible characters; then to start them off on their career through their one, two, or three volumes, as the case may be or the matter affords. In doing this it is obviously impossible to get them together in a line. It is a sort of handicap, and one naturally begins with one's greatest villain, fool, or hero, and so on until they are all marshalled before the public eye. We do not say that this is the proper method—far from it; it is only the way we are thinking of setting to work, which, Heaven save the mark! is a widely different affair. At the same time, we now feel ourselves compelled to warn our reader that we are given to writing vaguely, and that we do not pledge ourselves in the following chapter to have faithfully pursued the very system, whereof the exposition stands but a few lines above, scarce dry from our pen.



Will our reader be good enough, then, to imagine and place before his mind's eye the business chambers of Messrs Wright & Thoroughpace, Solicitors, Claw Lane, the Poultry, London—(we quote the address on one or two envelopes lying about.) There are but two persons seated in the dingy apartment to which we enter, and we will time ourselves so as to intrude upon their colloquy at that period near the end of it wherein is often condensed and summarised the preceding discursive matter, thereby saving much time and labour to the chronicler thereof. The nature of the conversation could hardly be gleaned from the countenances of the two gentlemen before us, for it was the business of one to conceal all inward workings from the public eye, and the other had made the same his study for many years, though, perhaps, without arriving at the same degree of proficiency.

This latter was a good-looking man—many people thought and said a prepossessing-looking man—scarcely arrived at the period of middle age. He displayed a fresh, ruddy, complexion, and wore, in a pair of perhaps rather close-set gray eyes, an expression which seemed to entreat confidence and good fellowship from the world in general. His forehead was high, though rather narrow, and somewhat retreating, and had a way of contracting itself in sudden folds without any very apparent provocation, from which state it would suddenly recover its normal condition of smoothness, as though the above were a nervous trick of which the owner was aware and somewhat impatient. A phrenologist might have objected to the rather

too great massiveness of the organs at the base of the skull ; but some of the most amiable people we know, are gifted with that characteristic. *You* are, Jack R——, and *you*, Dick T——, and better fellows and kinder-hearted than either of you never smoked a weed. And, besides, this last trait was concealed from the casual observer by the thick brown hair which fell, crisp and wavy, almost on the collar of his dark-gray riding-coat. His dress was that of a country gentleman—a little exaggerated, perhaps, in the determination of the wearer to look what he was—for he had occupied that position for years at least ; but we know more than one who, with every right to the name and the dignity involved in it, contrive to impart doubts to the minds of the uninitiated by the *ultra-bucolicism* of their get-up. How strange is the frequency of that morbid taste, actuated by which, the possessor of broad lands makes it his study to appear a yeoman, and the owner of a stud finds his ambition unfulfilled until he has the satisfaction of being mistaken perhaps for his own groom. But we digress, as we are apt to do when riding our Pegasus with a snaffle-bit. Pardon, dear reader, and accept our promise of better behaviour for the future.

With regard to Mr John Wright of Wright and Thoroughpace, &c., &c., opinions differed very much. Some people said he was a bore,—a peevish, disobliging, impracticable old beast. Others, again, swore that, were their business-agency worth a hundred thousand a-year, they would place it in no other hands than in that of the above firm, of which John was acting partner,—and that,

were it treble the amount, they would feel entire confidence in the accuracy and integrity of its management. Of the two classes, we should strongly recommend those in whom we take an interest to make friends with the last—*verb. sap.* Dry and reticent as he was, Mr Wright was a swift and unerring judge of character, and had a silent way of his own of letting people into the secret that he understood them. Now the estimate of one's character arrived at by an observer is not at all unlikely to differ from one's own; and even if one is obliged tacitly to admit its correctness, it does not follow that one should feel pleasure in seeing it blazoned on the demeanour of him to whom we are doing our best to convey a different, albeit deceptive, impression. What Mr Wright's opinion of his companion might be we shall not say, leaving it to be gathered from the nature of their discourse together. The latter began the conversation, or rather took up the thread of it where it fell as we entered the apartment.

"A strange story, after all, for the nineteenth century!"

"A very strange story indeed."

"Body found and identified—eh, Mr Wright?"

Mr John Wright, who most certainly was not in a talkative humour, for all other answer, placed one inky forefinger rather testily on an old copy of the *Times* which lay between them.

"Ah, to be sure. Then I suppose everything was quite satisfactory?"

"If a brother's violent death can be so called or considered."

“Called—perhaps not; considered—that’s another affair, by George, and depends upon circumstances.”

“Ahem—ahe—hem.” Mr Wright took a pinch of snuff.

“Eh?” A pause, after which the first speaker continued—

“Unmarried, and leaving behind him one of the best estates in Great Britain.”

“Certainly, one of the best.”

The younger man rose from his chair, went to the fire, and spread himself before it, facing his companion, after the manner of free-and-easy gentlemen. Mr Wright slowly turned half-round towards his desk, upon which lay various papers for signature, and so forth. The other understood the gesture; but he was not done with the subject yet.

“And yet,” said he, half-unconsciously pursuing the current of some thought of his own, and as though partly in soliloquy,—“And yet queer escapades have been performed now and then by these young bloods.”

“In what way, Mr St Alban?”

“In the way matrimonial, Mr Wright.”

“Pooh, pooh, my good sir;” the lawyer’s tone was dry enough to stop the flow of this idea at all events, but it rather seemed to encourage it on Mr St Alban’s part.

“A loose young fish like the late baronet.”

“Loose? Pardon me again, sir. A first-rate man of business, or would have been, but for his heart, which was as soft as a child’s.”

"No doubt; but that very soft heart of his was the thing which might have led him into the noose."

"Well, it won't be that quality in yours or mine that will lead us into that—or any other noose."

The lawyer chuckled, and none the less that Mr St Alban appeared by no means to relish his pleasantry. He fumbled somewhat confusedly for his pocket-handkerchief, and blew his nose sharply, taking more time about that operation than seemed necessary.

"Ahem—ha, ha; you are a wag, Mr Wright," said he, recovering himself, and resuming his careless air and his gloves together. This was a signal of departure, and the lawyer evidently accepted it as such. St Alban lingered, however, as if changing his mind on second thoughts, or as unwilling to leave the subject as it stood.

"So you don't take me for a susceptible man?" said he.

"I do not, indeed; I consider you too good a man of business."

"Ahumph—ha, ha! Well, I accept the compliment, trustful in the *animus* of the donor. The best in your repository, I take it—eh, Wright?"

The attorney had an objection to being addressed after this familiar fashion by any but a chosen few of his own selection; so he made no answer, but took another leisurely pinch of snuff, and paused, still holding a full pen suspended over the document before him. The other, instead of departing, sat down once more, and the lawyer very testily indeed resigned his implement of business, wheeled

round on his chair, and prepared to meet what further interrogatory was in store for him.

"This was—how many years ago?"

"What?"

"Sir Charles Maudesley's murder."

Mr Wright took up the ancient newspaper above alluded to and drily read out the date.

Mr St Alban buttoned his gloves, and the man of business looked at his watch. The former undeniably wore the air of one who has failed in some project he had at heart, though what it could be further than the satisfaction of vague curiosity remained a mystery. He now spoke with his hand on the door handle, and on a different subject, as though relinquishing the other in despair. One would have fancied the forthcoming one the more interesting of the two to him from its nature, but he certainly seemed less taken up about it.

"Then you will see about that matter of the mortgage?"

"Of course; but I warn you that the market at present is tightish."

"Will it be easier in a week or so?"

"That I cannot possibly say."

"Then get the thing arranged on the best terms you can, like a good fellow. I'll look in again by the end of the week, when I shall expect to find things ready to sign and seal. *Bon jour*," and the speaker at last fairly left the apartment.

Hailing the first cab, and directing the man to drive to

the ——— Club, Mr Geoffrey St Alban, for such was his name, pondered over the matters suggested by the earlier part of the late conversation.

“Putting my affairs into the agency of Messrs Wright and Thoroughpace has not answered nor is likely to answer as I expected,” mused he. “I am not sure that I ought not to have placed them in the hands of Abrahams, or some such firm, who would have readily played any game indicated to them, instead of sticking obstinately to a broad and open system, like that old jackdaw. But I’ll make him drop his cheese yet, fair means or foul,” continued he, reverting in thought to the repositories of Æsop. “And those worthy Israelites don’t go down with one’s acquaintance, and are apt to be expensive, though unprejudiced. And with that cursed drain on me—I—I”—— (here he made such a violent contortion that he quite shook the cab, and drew an exclamation of “Wo, there, wo,” from the cabman.) “Ah, well, a way may be found to fill that up too;” and as Mr St Alban muttered to himself, caressing his chin with his gloved hand, the expression of his countenance was not that of a philanthropist by any means.

It was now about the third hour after noon, and there were a good many loungers in the large reading-rooms of the ——— club. There was, however, less appearance of mere *idlesse* than was usual there; for the ——— was a political club, was on the side of the present government, and a great crisis was daily expected. There were, therefore, a good many anxious little groups, composed of a

good many listeners and a few spokesmen, according to rule. In one of these, among the former, we recognise a face very lately introduced to our notice under the broad oaks of Maudesley Hall—the civilian, we need scarcely say, not the man of war. Although no orator, he is treated with the deference due to his position as a man possessing broad lands, and, ergo, many votes. He is even being now urged to assume a prominent place in the forthcoming expected struggle.

“You should, you really should consent to stand, Maudesley,” urged a brother baronet. “Consider how d——d close the Tories have invariably run us in ——shire; and —— has given his constituents less satisfaction than ever this session, they tell me.”

“Who can wonder at it? He’s been shut out of three divisions, hard-run questions, within the last six months. He’s getting past service,” said a fierce little fat man, with twinkling black eyes, and a small pug nose in the very centre of his face.

“They’ll get —— to stand, or ——; both popular men in spite of their politics; and for that matter,” said bluff Sir James Bellingham, “——shire has not been so very long orthodox in its views, eh, Maudesley? Your brother, Sir Charles, poor fellow—humph, ha”——

Sir James stopped short, and floundered, being struck with the emotion called up by his remark in Sir Ralph’s demeanour. The latter, always pale, had turned livid, and was supporting himself by the back of a chair, in a man-



ner which looked rather precarious for their joint stability, —his own and that of the piece of furniture.

"Come, think of it seriously, and let us be up and doing," resumed the first speaker, after a rather awkward pause.

"No," said Sir Ralph Maudesley, somewhat faintly, but still in a tone of decision. "It is not possible; though I thank you, Bellingham. My wife's health, putting my own out of the question, makes a prolonged residence in town a thing not to be thought of; but I—I"——

"Eh? See what Dawbody says to it?" (Sir Gregory Dawbody was the fashionable *medico* of the day—a clever man and a complaisant.) "By all means consult Dawbody."

"No; on active public life I will not enter; but I'll find you a man."

"Who?" This interrogatory in as many different voices as there were members of the group.

"St Alban of Monkshood Vale."

There was a dead silence, and Sir James Bellingham turned very red in the face. The little fat man with the pug nose mentioned above, who studied Sir James and caricatured him, became of a hue approaching to purple.

"St Alban! why, nobody knows him. Granting his principles to be all right, his status in the county is *nil*. As for his purse, that"——

"When I mentioned his name," said Sir Ralph Maudesley, still in that strange listless tone with which he

usually conversed on matters of public import, "I intended it to be inferred that I should see to the smoothing of such difficulties as that."

The group of politicians were a little disconcerted, and very much surprised. Mr St Alban had been only lately introduced to the club on Sir Ralph Maudesley's sponsorship, backed by some one of no great standing there, and had narrowly escaped being black-balled,—the malcontents, of course, being *quasi*-unknown. Sir Ralph's manner also was very peculiar even to those accustomed to his ways. Though bringing forward a proposition of so much moment, he shewed no sort of anxiety about it, but spoke wearily and in a depressed sort of way, as though acquitting himself of a task for which he felt some degree of repugnance. Under these circumstances, it was scarcely likely that his proposal should find favour.

"You know best,—that is, you have a right to your own opinion as to what chance such a nominee would have with the ——shire people," said Sir James, who had declined standing himself, by the by, on the ground of an embarrassed rent-roll; "but I should think a man so little known—not that I mean to undervalue *your* countenance"—

"Hold hard, Bellingham," here murmured another of the party in the speaker's ear, "here comes the very man. Let him tell his own story, if he will, and have done with it; the sooner the better; stuff and nonsense."

St Alban's demeanour, as he approached the group, was calculated to disarm open hostility at least, and, indeed,

had been planned and studied as he mounted the staircase with that precise view. He bowed gravely, as he came near, to those with whom he was personally acquainted, and stood on the outskirts of the group with an observant and slightly anxious air, as though deprecating the idea of intrusion, while modestly desirous of gleaning information on the subject of discussion—the one absorbing topic of the day. Sir Ralph Maudesley's features preserved their customary impassibility, a slight nervous twitch playing about the corners of his mouth. Sir James Bellingham looked with some curiosity at Mr St Alban's visage, which was grave and deferential. The little fat gentleman glanced fiercely in the same direction, and then inquiringly towards Sir James. The remainder coughed, fumbled in their waistcoat pockets, and so forth.

"We were discussing the forthcoming dissolution, Mr St Alban," said Sir James, dashing, as was his wont, *in medias res*.

"Indeed!—you consider it, then, certain?"

"Pretty nearly so; which being the case, one's thoughts naturally turn to the redistribution of seats."

Mr St Alban looked thoughtful, and bent his head without speaking.

"Sir Ralph Maudesley suggests as a fitting man to bring forward for ——shire, in the event of —— declining to stand again—yourself."

Sir James Bellingham's abruptness rather posed the object of his attack. The baronet had served as a post-captain in the navy, and had been rather celebrated for

the straightforward "hammer-and-tongs" nature of his tactics in battle. This peculiarity he carried with him into private life.

"What do you say to that?"

"Say—really, Sir James," said Mr St Alban, smiling faintly, "a little consideration would be a necessary preliminary to my saying anything on the subject."

Sir James blew his nose, and the little stout gentleman pursed up his lips and shook his head dubiously.

"Well," continued the former, "I am a plain man, Mr St Alban, and I mean no offence to you or to my friend Maudesley; but—if you will take my advice, you will drop the scheme altogether."

"Scheme! My dear Sir James, there is none—never was—some distant suggestion—Sir Ralph Maudesley *was* kind enough to hint."

"No matters these, nor times for vague hinting," muttered Sir James's henchman, whose name was Buncombe.

"True; nor can we, I think, afford to put forward candidates, where parties are so equally divided, whose success is not certain. Yours could not be so, Mr St Alban, even counting on the Maudesley interest. Sir Ralph does not contradict me, you see. My good sir, it would not do."

Thus oracularly delivering himself, the gallant officer took Mr Buncombe's arm, and separated himself from the group; the latter little man fussily, and therefore awkwardly, accommodating his step to that of his taller companion, and volubly expressing acquiescence in his sentiments so conveyed. Sir James was a —shire proprietor.

Mr Buncombe was not; but political controversy in general was the breath of his nostrils, following out which tendency, he became a toady to those of superior standing, a bully to the few whom he could outtalk or overcrow, and a bore to all, except to the one particular Ajax who had a fancy for such a Thersites, and a use whereto to put him.

In the meantime, Sir Ralph Maudesley and Mr St Alban—the latter looking somewhat crestfallen, in spite of his efforts to conceal it, the former preserving that expression of gray, frozen vacuity which was habitual to him—conversed apart. St Alban spoke, and the baronet listened, or, at all events, sat silent; but we may here interpolate our own impression as regards the late colloquy, namely, that Sir James Bellingham's broadside had done its work, and that Mr Geoffrey St Alban will not stand at present for —shire.

Curiously enough, when Mr John Wright had dismissed his client, as above narrated, the honest lawyer's ruminations nearly tallied with those of the latter gentleman. "What could hae brought that man and his affairs to us?" (Mr Wright always *thought* and, when excited, generally *spoke* in his mother tongue, for he was Scotch.) "But it 'll just be part o' the big game he thinks he's playin'. An' Maudesley to go and make a confidant o' a man like that! Daft, clean daft! *Quem Deus vult perdere*—Dear me, dear me! And the bonny lassie, Geraldine, that shud hae been his niece, I think, and no his daughter, though her mother's a jewel of price, and ower gude

for her setting—but the lassie's safe frae a' but a fright or sae—as safe as the mail—that's ae comfort, Mr St Alban." Thus mysteriously connecting a young lady's name with that of his suspicious client, Mr John Wright took a congratulatory pinch of snuff, and transferred his attention tranquilly to the multifarious business on the desk before him.

He was not destined to labour long uninterrupted. A tap at the door speedily announced a new visitor. "The deevil's in them!" began the lawyer; but his brow cleared as he saw whose ample form darkened the doorway in answer to his testy, "Come in."

"Oh, come away, captain; come away, and sit doon and tell us your news," said he, getting up with quite an air of alacrity, and cordially shaking hands with the new comer, who was no other than our acquaintance Thornfield.

"News!—nothing—the old thing—all as it was, and is likely to be."

"Not so long as you think, maybe. There's a storm brewing, captain."

"Ay! Anything new come to *your* notice, then?"

"Well, it's not to say new, but the bubble has come to thae dimensions that it cannot but burst before long. You'll mind what I told you about that silly creature yonder making confidences where he was mad so much as to open his lips."

"Ay, ay. I have seen something like that before in similar cases. Well?"

"Weel, that man's been here this day—not an hour since—prying, and pumping, and insinuating."

"So lately? *Caramba!* I should like to see him."

"Better not; leave me to manage his part of the affair; it's more in my way than yours, captain."

"Bah! far be it from me to interfere. Remember, I have no reason to wish for a new state of things at all."

"Except for your friend's sake."

"I don't know even about that. We have been very happy together; still there are more interests at stake than even his; and you know well that no thought of my own will hinder the good cause."

"I do know it well."

"And yet, if you only knew what Basil Thornfield once was—before he met *him*;—without that, it is little use asking you to observe what he is now."

The soldier's tone was melancholy, though he tried to make it gay. Mr Wright's eyes glistened as he looked over his spectacles at that bluff visage.

"I observe that he is now, what in his heart he must always have been—an honest man. An' that is much for the like of me to allow of one who has led your harum-scarum life, captain."

"And I take you to be the same, Mr Wright," responded the latter, resuming a light tone; "and that is no small thing for me to allow of one who follows your profession. *Basta!*—I must be moving. Have you any despatches for — over the way?"

"A small packet; and 'over-the-way,' as you call him,

will no doubt write as usual. It is essential that his whereabouts should be accurately known to me, Captain Thornfield. Remember what I have hinted."

"Clouds on the horizon? Ay, depend upon us. For the present, let me see—we shall be at Gibraltar for a week or so after I arrive there, thence through Spain, perhaps to France. There are clouds brewing *there*, Mr Wright, war clouds; and we must be at the old work when it is to be got."

"Captain, captain, take an old man's advice, and leave these wild doings once and for ever! Remember, oh, remember, what is at stake!"

"For him and through him—yes! And he shan't go into this other business if I can prevent him; but for me, an outcast, almost a nameless man, what better hope than that my shroud should be a soldier's blanket? Fare-you-well, good old fellow; is this the packet? Thanks! I am off to Southampton in three hours' time—to-morrow, on board the steamer, and hurra for a toss on the bonny blue sea! I settle down? Ha, ha! How the first whistle of the strong breeze through the rigging, and the dash of salt spray on my cheek, would scatter such a notion to the four points of the compass! God bless you, Mr Wright. Watch the clouds, and give us due notice of the coming storm; and if the bullet and the sabre spare me, I'll see our brave bark steered safely into port." Wringing the lawyer's hand with a fervency of pressure which probably was somewhat more than pleasant, Captain Thornfield turned his back upon the office, and strode swiftly down the



street. Mr Wright sat for a moment or two mechanically chafing the knuckles of his right hand, which presented a surface of strongly-marked alternate red and white; but as his meditations took the shape in which Lord Burleigh is described as having clothed his,\* we think it unnecessary to pursue them further for the present.

\* The farce of "The Critic."

## CHAPTER IV.

### MAUDESLEY HALL.

A FEW days after the events of the preceding chapter, Sir Ralph Maudesley returned home to his family mansion, which was situated in an agricultural county, about thirty miles from the metropolis, and was distant three or four miles from a branch-railway station. We need not,—perhaps we are doubtful of our powers—at all events we shall not, (and that is good schoolboy philosophy,)—minutely describe the vast old pile of building rejoicing in the name of Maudesley Hall. Any reader with the commonest share of imaginative faculty can portray it for himself from such hints as we *can* supply.

Gray stone battlements, moss and lichen here and there, especially on the basement story, sundry encroachments made by modern art and ideas of comfort, but all carefully adapted to the old style of architecture, terraced gardens, a rudely-sculptured coat of arms with date of incredible antiquity over the great gate, a brace of monsters guardant, a fountain, (modern antique,) clamorous rooks innumerable among tall, gaunt elms, ample offices on an entirely modern plan some distance off, and, alas! a want

of *life* about the whole which was not natural to the picture, but had its origin in the unsocial disposition of the owner. Sir Ralph Maudesley could not indeed be said to be popular; he held himself too much aloof from his fellow-men; and, being conscious of the unpleasant effect of his peculiarity in this respect, he was careful to spread abroad the plea of infirm health, and consequently depressed nervous system. But, then, he was highly respectable; and if he did not quite adhere to the maxim that his right hand should not know the doings of his left, but, on the contrary, let his light burn brightly before men, so much as to dazzle their eyes somewhat, his charities were really magnificent, on a scale, indeed, which astonished the neighbours, and threw quite into the shade all deeds of beneficence either of the present day or existing in the county traditions. "It is an ill wind," saith the proverb, "that blows no one good." This was a breeze laden with good things to an extent that carried joy into many a deserving household, and something like that sensation into many others not quite so deserving.

Sir Ralph's doings, strange to say, were not so much to the taste of the rector of the parish, the Rev. Otho Docksay, as they were to that of Mr O'Toole, the Roman Catholic priest, a very shrewd personage, lately arrived in the vicinity, who ruled despotically over a small but most submissive, not to say abject, congregation, composed chiefly of Irish labourers on the adjacent half-finished railway-lines. This worthy had pricked up his ears at the first reports which reached them of the baronet's doings, and

was now gradually edging his way towards a personal acquaintance with that gentleman, whose demeanour on one or two occasions, when they had been thrown together, he had carefully studied and highly approved of. We may mention *en passant* that the astute confessor had thought it advisable also to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr St Alban; but this was a matter about which he had neither felt diffidence nor experienced difficulty, although by no means ostensibly numbering the latter among his flock. The soundness of Mr St Alban's views was unquestionable—no more regular communicant, no one more punctilious in general attendance,—but why pursue the enumeration of his virtues in detail? No more *respectable man* in every way. The Rev. Otho himself had a high opinion of Mr St Alban, and made reference to him on many points of parochial interest. He was not very rich, more's the pity, but with what unction he dropped his occasional mite! Ah, if there were but more like him! Dear friends, respectable friends, content yourselves, there *are* a good many in this world we live in.

On just such a magnificent summer afternoon as that described in a former chapter, two ladies sat under the shade of the old elms, and mingled the piano note of their conversation with the much higher-pitched music of the rooks. One was very young, the other not old, though looking more so than she really was. Both were eminently adorned with the good gifts of nature, and were richly though plainly dressed, in accordance with their years. *Au reste*, at a glance it could be seen that they were mother and daughter,

they were so much alike in feature; but there was a sad difference, independent of the course of time, when one took a closer view. Lady Maudesley, the elder of the twain, had the hollow cheek, dim eye, and languid action of a confirmed invalid. The younger lady (indeed she was little beyond girlhood) seemed to present the breathing picture of what the other probably had been. Dark glossy hair, simply braided, set off the small and delicately-shaped head; the rounded cheek was damask; the forehead, throat, and firm but beautifully-moulded chin, were of transparent alabaster. But the eyes—*they* formed the charm of charms in that exquisite countenance. They were of that deep violet tint which is rarely seen except in the eyes of a very young child; shaded by long eyelashes of the same dark hue and silken texture as the glossy hair, and surmounted by pencilled arches of classical regularity. Still, exactly regular the features were not. If they had been, the whole effect would probably have been less bewilderingly lovely. Such is our attempt to portray Geraldine Maudesley.

The expression of pain, or rather intense weariness, which sat on the features of Lady Maudesley seemed one habitual to her, and as though beyond her control; but in her daughter—that air of half-alarm, half-defiance, with a curious indefinable tinge of scornful mirth over all—that surely could not be the natural expression of the fair young features.

They were not talking much, and the young lady twisted a garden bonnet by the strings, in a sort of pettishly meditative way, while her mother gazed vacantly

on the rich banquet of colour displayed by the adjoining *parterres*, and sighed—not as those sigh to whom excess of happiness becomes almost pain. Their conversation, such as it was, was now interrupted.

A servant had approached so noiselessly that they were unaware of his coming till he stood before them. Everything was done in this piano style at Maudesley Hall. The elder lady was the first to perceive him, and her slight start also recalled the young girl from her dream-land.

“What is it, James. Has Sir Ralph returned?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Alone?”

“No, my lady. Mr St Alban”——

“Very well.”

The last words were spoken in a tone wherein no one but a very acute observer would have detected aught but indifference. The man bowed and departed. Lady Maudesley turned and looked upon her daughter's face. Alas! the expression there was but a stronger reflection of her own; and it was not one of joy that the husband and father had returned.

“Mamma,” said the young lady—and she spoke in the eager, querulous tone of a thwarted child, though there was terror also in the accents—“mamma, is there no escape from that man's presence?”

“Not for this evening, I fear, Geraldine.”

“This evening! if it were only that; but he comes so often, and he persecutes me so.”

"Hush, hush, conceited one!" The words were playful; and the tones were meant to be so; but there was no corresponding mirth in the troubled eyes.

"But he does, mamma; and papa sees it, and you too, and yet"——

"And yet?"

"Still he comes, and receives a welcome from one of us at least."

"My dearest, we cannot tell what interests your father and he may have in common."

"But why cannot we? Why are we left to wonder what common interests can exist between two so different, strong enough to change the better nature to the likeness of the worse? and so wondering, how can we but fear? Mother, when we became so rich, and were given so charming a home, what dreams of perfect happiness we indulged; and where are they now?"

"There is no such thing, Geraldine, on this side the grave." The lady spoke in half soliloquy, and the words and tone went well together now. "We can but soften our lot by anchoring our hopes on the one sure foundation."

"But to be so miserable!"—the young lady spoke passionately, and with a dark flush on her brow—"to have the clouds settle on one's path so early!"

"Dearest, you may be giving way to unnecessary fears, and making the clouds darker than they need be. Fix a trustful gaze forward, Geraldine, and your vision may pierce through to bright things in store. Courage!"

"Courage? I should not be wanting in that, if it were only for myself. But do you think I am blind to the effect of all this upon you? I *dare not* look forward, mother dear!"

The elder lady, by a strong effort, recovered herself, and spoke even cheerfully to the girl, whose head was nestling on her breast.

"Dear Geraldine, reflect that the immediate cause of this excitement is the having to entertain an unpleasant guest at dinner. As yet, at least, he is nothing more to either of us."

"Nor shall be!"

"Nor shall be!" echoed Lady Maudesley, passing her arm protectingly round her daughter's waist. "Geraldine," continued she, slightly hesitating, as though impelled by circumstances to disclose that which she had meant to keep secret, "I have taken the first step I ever took without your father's knowledge and consent, and have appealed for counsel and assistance elsewhere."

"Who can have it in their power to afford either?"

"I have written to your godfather."

"Colonel Clinton! I am so glad;" and Geraldine's face was radiant with pleasure in a moment. That gloomy expression natural to those features? Pshaw! Expression chased expression on that countenance like summer breezes over corn.

"I have asked him to come. If man can help us, he will; and on his brave open nature I have great reliance. He knows how we are situated—the unaccountable sorrow



which has changed your father's very nature—the mysterious influence exercised upon him by this man, for whom we cannot feel esteem. The way in which poor Frank ”——

“O mamma!—please, please”—Geraldine broke in beseechingly, her face and neck again suffused with carnation, “must it be known beyond ourselves that any one has dared ”——

“I have disclosed nothing, dearest, which need cause you pain. He knows enough to make him exert every fibre of his brain to succour us. Therefore, courage, again, darling, and face boldly what awaits us now—all will be well with my Geraldine.”

“And with you?” The girl spoke almost in a whisper, as though half dreading the response. “All will be well with you once more?”

“If it be God's will, and in His own good time.” And with these trustful words, much lightened in heart, the twain went slowly hand in hand beneath the green archway of the garden walk. There was, indeed, a bright light in the eyes of the younger lady, as they silently proceeded towards the house, and in those of the elder a sort of troubled hopefulness. That is the expression which most nearly conveys the idea I hold in my mind's eye—an awkward rendering thereof; which is the more a pity, that, certain am I, some of us have experienced the sensation, and would recognise it if faithfully described. It is when, pressed by a weight of evil grown intolerable, we force ourselves to some bold stroke, long thought of, never ventured, and feel at once that we have turned the course of

events into another and more hopeful channel, wherein that which fostered the evil will be wanting, and all antagonistic to its existence.

We have not yet made acquaintance with Lady Maudesley's knight-errant, (alas that she should need one, and her husband ever near!) but ere long we shall introduce him to notice, and explain the relations which subsisted between them. In the meantime, one word in explanation of those circumstances which placed Sir Ralph Maudesley in his present position.

Ralph had begun his career a younger brother, with a younger brother's fortune, and at the period of his father's death had only attained a subordinate position in the diplomatic service. His elder brother, Sir Charles, was reputed to be a wild young man, and was certainly an eccentric one, if utter freedom from the trammels of conventional tastes, and a thorough indifference to the opinions of his fellow-men, constituted that quality; and indeed in one so young (for he was barely eight-and-twenty when left owner of the Maudesley Hall property) such views and feelings must be held to be unusual at the least of it. He resided very little at home, or in his native country at all, though he expended money without stint upon the establishment which he thought fit to maintain in his absence. He paid flying visits at longish intervals to the Hall, never giving much notice of his advent, and without any particular plan in relation to season, and returned at the end of each to his real home, his yacht, wherein he visited many strange nooks and corners of the globe, mixing, according to the country

gossip, in many strange scenes there enacted. He was a good deal of an amateur "martialist," too, as well as mariner, and, it was whispered, had taken a part in every revolution of those times in Europe, escaping very narrowly on sundry occasions with his life, of which latter possession he seemed reckless enough to satisfy the hungriest heir-at-law. *Au reste*, he was a generous, high-spirited, kindly-disposed young man, and his friends and dependents, who were both numerous, wished, while blaming him for his wild living, that they could see more of him, if not get him fairly settled down among them. But the latter class had nothing to complain of, except as regarded the light of his countenance. His agents, who had acted in a similar capacity for his father before him, Messrs Wright & Thoroughpace, had full powers and instructions to conduct his affairs on the most liberal footing; and indeed there was not a single well-grounded grievance existing among the whole tenantry, high or low, of the Maudesley estate. With his brother, Ralph, he ever preserved the most affectionate relations. His purse, especially after the latter made a love-match with a young lady of good lineage and many attractions, but of slender fortunes, was as much at the service of the couple as if it half belonged to them. To do Ralph justice, he had sufficient pride to prevent his applying much to that fund; but his own means were certainly scarcely adequate to his expenditure, and he sighed as he thought how he could have appreciated the tranquillity of life, which the fortunate first-born made so little account of. "The tranquillity ——" this was what he said to himself,

looking peevishly round his dim half-furnished and wholly inconvenient apartments at Constantinople, we will suppose. But, truth is, it was not the tranquillity, but the position attainable by the owner of Maudesley Hall, which Ralph yearned after. He and his spouse, their own home being with the embassy to which he happened to be attached at the time, generally spent a few months every second or third year under the ancestral roof, whether the owner were there or not; and Ralph's was not a mind to remain unimpressed by the difference of demeanour (as he thought) on the part both of the county society and the humbler classes, in addressing himself and Sir Charles, or even in talking of the latter. Thus, either inventing what had no existence, or morbidly distorting and magnifying what he saw, this poor young man ingeniously tormented himself while remaining his brother's guest. He had at first occasionally confided his sorrows in the above matter to his wife; but as she expressed no sympathy for his sufferings, not in the least understanding their origin, he had somewhat angrily desisted from seeking comfort in that quarter.

The baronet's mode of life was not, as may be supposed, favourable to the matrimonial manœuverings of the gifted mammas in the vicinity. In using the expression "gifted," we allude to those possessed of marketable specimens of that sort of merchandise which mammas are conventionally understood to be, at most times, and on suitable terms, prepared to dispose of. This, therefore, did not exactly conduce to the popularity of Sir Charles with that most dignified class, (we talk not in despite,) the turbaned, the

velvet-robed, the ample ivory-fanned; but they lived in hopes that he might see the error of his ways, and come to their bazaar before texture shrivelled and colour faded, and of all things not allow himself to be snapped up in the meantime by some designing foreigner, which would be a sad thing for his family—and for himself no doubt. They by no means, however, wished him serious harm to life or limb,—especially to the former,—circumstances rendering it impossible that a change in the ownership of Maudesley Hall should be productive of benefit.

One comfort was, Sir Charles Maudesley's religious principles remained (on the authority of the Reverend Otho) purely and fervently Protestant. That divine, whenever the subject was broached, emphatically bore testimony to the soundness of the baronet's views and practice in the matter of the Christian faith.

"If the outer shell be a little strange to the eye, the kernel is sound, sound to the heart," said Mr Docksay. By the by, we must here interpolate that the good rector, in using this figure, by no means alluded to the personal attributes of Sir Charles, who was remarkably handsome, and, many people said, far more prepossessing in appearance than his younger brother. However, the matrons aforesaid listened and were comforted; all would be well, and as it ought to be some day, when the baronet should have sown his wild oats. But, in the meantime, my stars! what a crop they promised to be! He had engrossed his brother's share of the seed as well as his own, apparently; for Ralph sowed none, as far as the world could see, while

Charles scattered a double allowance broad-cast over the face of the known globe—and further, perhaps, for all any one could tell. At last came the crash which cut short the poor wanderer's seed-time, while realising the occasional fears and overwhelming the never-abandoned hopes of the dowagers at home.

Little Geraldine, Ralph's only-surviving child, (two others, boys, had died in infancy, to the great grief of their parents,) was about ten years of age, and, with the latter, was on her way home from Constantinople to England, where she was to remain for educational purposes, when Sir Charles, who had also wandered to that part of Europe, having been cruising about the Grecian Archipelago, was murdered by some Turkish bandits only a few days before the brothers had expected to meet. They were to have rendezvoused at a small town on the coast of the Sea of Marmora, and thence proceeded home in the *Coral Branch*, the baronet's schooner yacht, which was a handsome vessel of more than two hundred tons burthen.

We need not now linger over the details of this sad event. They will all come before our readers in the course of the following chapters. Nor can we venture to analyse the sensations of Ralph Maudesley, (now *Sir Ralph*,) upon the occasion. His outward demeanour, at all events, was that of one almost distracted; so much so, as to puzzle some who knew him, or fancied they did. If he was acting, he was a better actor than even *they* had given him credit for being, and that he was no bad one, all, or nearly

all, suspected. Still there are certain signs which cannot lend themselves to lies. Counterfeit sorrow does not blanch the hair, and hollow the cheek, and shatter the nervous system; and all these symptoms, more or less, appeared upon Sir Ralph Mandesley, during the course of years immediately following his accession to the coveted honours. Alas, for poor human nature,—there is no lesson more humiliatingly instructive than the sight of an unholy craving satisfied, and its results. We can fancy the angels weeping over such a sight, and a corresponding jubilee being made *elsewhere*.

In the meantime, it was not unnatural that those who drank from his cup and lay on his bosom from day to day should catch the infection of his malady; for to that his morbid grief amounted. Young Geraldine's strong youthful spirits and elastic nature survived the evil influence, for a long time at least, unharmed; but Lady Mandesley—*she* had never been strong, nor had she ever quite recovered the depression of spirits consequent on her babies' death. *She* began to droop and wither like an early summer blossom beneath a July sun. It might have been expected, on the contrary, that she would have revived under the refreshing influence of her native air, which, on the occasion of former visits, had always done her good; but it was not so. To the mystification of the doctors, and the grief and anxiety of her husband and child, the malady, whatever its nature, gained ground. And yet the family physician, no less a personage than Sir Gregory

Dawbody, (with countless initials following,) refused to take a despairing view of a case where no organic disease could be detected.

"It was one of those mysterious visitations of ill health, which, coming from a source unrecognisable, might go in a similar manner."

This was what Sir Gregory said to Sir Ralph; but he felt strongly inclined to add that, had he the full confidence of his patient, he might be better able to prescribe for her. The evil was not in the blood, nor was it in the brain; but deeper in the bosom than probe or stethoscope could investigate.

This being so, the doctor, while continuing to watch the case, virtually handed it over to the great, silent practitioner, Time. In point of fact, something had been done by the latter physician in amelioration of the above state of things. Peace or tranquillity, indeed, could scarcely be said to exist in such a gloomy atmosphere as that of Maudesley Hall; but Sir Ralph's fits of acute mental distress had become less frequent, as well as less prolonged; he had even begun to mix a little in society, and to pave his way to further intercourse by assuming an active part in county matters, when there suddenly appeared a new performer on the scene; a very unobtrusive one to all seeming—but who had power, from some mysterious cause, to introduce a new and most irreconcilable element into the chaos of affairs.

A few years before the time of which we are writing, a neighbouring proprietor, an eccentric individual of advanced



years, and childless, with whom Sir Ralph Maudesley had had little intercourse, died suddenly, leaving no will; the estate which he had owned passing into the hands of a distant relative, whom no one in the county seemed to have ever heard of. He appeared quite suddenly at the nick of time to urge and establish his claims, which he set forth clearly enough according to the requirements of the law. His name was Geoffry St Alban, the surname being the same as that lately possessed by the deceased squire. The precise degree of relationship did not publicly transpire, and Monkshood Vale being a property of very moderate dimensions, no one, after a time—not even the dowagers aforesaid—troubled their heads much on the subject. Mr St Alban had, according to his own account, passed the preceding portion of his life principally in Australia, where he had been endeavouring to amass a fortune, and had failed in that object. For himself, he appeared to be a good-humoured, unassuming personage enough; and though certainly betraying that want of polish which was to be expected in one so brought up, he yet possessed a degree of rough natural tact (it was not unlike *cunning*, and probably served its owner under that designation previous to his becoming a landowner) which suggested to him in some measure the proper demeanour when in contact with the shy county aristocracy. Now, there was really nothing against the man, as regards family and precedents, (the latter being unknown, except from his own statements,) therefore more or less civility had been vouchsafed him by his immediate neighbours, and by those of

his brother squires with whom he became acquainted in the way of business; that is, after he had succeeded, by using judicious means, in getting placed upon the roll of the county magistracy. By the above phrase, we wish it to be understood that Mr St Alban took advantage of the fact that his political views were strictly in accordance with those of the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, and with those of the majority of the landed gentry therein, as of course you or I would have done in his place. It was a fortunate coincidence, and yet his views and opinions were so mildly expressed, as scarcely, if at all, to wound the susceptibilities of the opposite party, who numbered in their ranks many very influential men. Thus it gradually became by no means certain that Mr St Alban was not, on the whole, rather an acquisition to the county. "Clever second-rate men are sometimes very useful," said Lord de Wyvern, her Majesty's Lieutenant for —shire, and he was surely justified in so saying. Though Mr St Alban heard of the above remark, and gnashed his teeth in private thereat, he by no means relaxed in his efforts to cultivate the good graces of the magnate who made it.

It was pretty plain, however, that the civility Mr St Alban received and the position accorded him were, in a sort of way, under protest, and that their duration depended very much upon the discretion and *savoir faire* of the party recipient. Now it did not at all suit that gentleman's views that matters should so rest. On the contrary, he never ceased elaborately chalking out for himself a game of much greater magnitude, though he was obliged to con-

fess that, to play it with any hope of success, he must secure higher cards than those he at present held. The fact was, old Humphrey St Alban, his predecessor and relative, though of lineage respectable enough as far as it could be traced, had been the architect of his own position as a country gentleman, and could scarcely be said to have passed beyond the outer circumference of that fiery circle which Geoffry was bent upon penetrating, and wherein he despaired not of becoming a radiating influence before "Time should have thinned his flowing hair."

Sir Ralph Maudesley had at this time, as we have noticed, begun to emerge a little from the shell of his reserve, and to shew some intention of assuming that place in society which was his by right of position. Mr Geoffry St Alban got introduced to Sir Ralph, studied him, and soon formed a pretty accurate estimate of his mental *calibre*. The general notion at this time was, that the baronet's melancholy was attributable to grief for his brother's death, coupled with the shock to his nervous system from the fearful circumstances attending it; why, we shall not now stop to consider; but certain it is, that Mr St Alban, after some consideration, set this down as a possibly important point in his game, and played diligently up to it with such cards as he had, some of the best of them being dealt him by the baronet himself. Regardless of the fact that, in proportion as he openly devoted himself to this special pursuit, his progress into the good graces of society in general seemed to languish, Mr St Alban steadily pursued his object, which was nothing less than the

acquisition of the moody baronet's unreserved confidence.

The first and sure sign of success was a startling and very apparent change in the relations between the two.

It became all at once patent to the view not only of Sir Ralph's family, but of the neighbours round (though in a less degree) that Mr St Alban was exercising an influence over that gentleman which was little short of absolute, and that its first effects threatened to be a return to the depths of despondency, from which the latter had lately half-emerged. Sir Ralph's friends viewed this state of things not only with surprise but with indignation; as for Mr St Alban, whatever his ultimate aim might be, he most certainly had not improved his late footing in society, but very much the reverse. And Sir Ralph would have been left nearly alone with his new friend or persecutor, and the innocent members of his household would have suffered with him, but for the firm hold the latter had obtained on the affections of those with whom they had been on terms of intimacy. Lady Maudesley was so gentle and unaffectedly kind, and Geraldine was becoming so attractive both in person and manner, that, partly in pity for the former, and partly in admiration for the latter, certain families, with their sons and daughters, continued almost to force their attentions upon them.

Among those who had succeeded in establishing a degree of intimacy with the Maudesleys, strong enough to survive occasional shocks from Sir Ralph's eccentric conduct, were the Wilmots of Wilmot's-Tower, persons of

high consideration in the county, on every score of birth, property, and personal accomplishments. The family consisted of Mr and Mrs Wilmot, a son lately arrived at maturity, and two daughters about Geraldine's own age. The son, Captain Francis Wilmot, a very prepossessing young man in appearance and manners, was at present serving with his regiment in the Mediterranean; the young ladies, though scarcely qualified to rival Geraldine in personal attractions, were good-humouredly conscious of the fact, and none the less disposed to attach themselves to the owner of those surpassing charms. Fortunately, or unfortunately, as events may turn out, Captain Frank was inclined to take a similar view of the matter. And what could have been more natural or more promising? Wilmot's-Tower, if not quite so extensive a property as Maudesley, was not to be despised; the family was unexceptionable, the youth himself in person and principles everything that could be wished; lastly, Geraldine was quite of that opinion, and everything went merry as a marriage bell, until Mr Geoffrey St Alban played his best trump, and seemed to have the game in his hand.

To cut short what might be a story too long for any reader's patience, the last-named gentleman had lately, after causing, by his demeanour, much surprise and vexation to poor Geraldine, boldly thrown aside all disguise, and come openly forward as a suitor for that young lady's hand. Nor was he to be deterred by the transparent indignation with which his advances were received by the object thereof. A sort of blind impassibility to rebuff

seemed to be his cue. If it could not be a love-match, (he could scarcely expect that at his time of life compared with hers,) he seemed content that it should be one based on the more substantial ground of *convenience*, backed by parental authority, and that his own merits should be reserved as a matter for discussion in the leisure time which would ensue, the knot being fairly tied. And could Sir Ralph Maudesley thus deliberately lend himself not only to crush the young affections of his own child,—those affections to the development of which he had given actual encouragement but yesterday,—not only that, but to force upon the wounded heart an object which he knew could never rest there, save as an intolerable burden too grievous to be borne? Was he striving to transfer that load from his own shoulders to those fair young ones, to prevent the wind from visiting which too roughly he should have bared his own carcass to the biting storm? Alas, it would be impossible to analyse the father's feelings or intentions on the subject, or to understand their precise bent, from his very action in the matter! He certainly did not attempt any discouragement to Mr St Alban's suit. He even made some vague show of furthering it by word of admonition, feeble and vacillating, like all connected with him, couched, indeed, in terms which seemed to say, "I am following a blind course, without volition, driven by an adverse fate. Refuse this step, and kill me; take it, and let me die!" Geraldine and her mother, her one *confidante* and counsellor, viewed his conduct and listened to his

incoherent appeals in terror and mystification, and yielded by turns to hope, and something akin to despair.

Young Wilmot, when last at home on leave of absence, had found himself received with coldness by Sir Ralph, and with a painful degree of embarrassment both by Lady Maudesley and Geraldine herself, who really did not know what to say to him, though the heart of the latter ached sorely, and indeed that of the former also, to see the youth depart from them in scarce-concealed grief and indignation for an indefinite period,—“Perhaps for ever!” sighed the one lady and sobbed the other, as his manly form slowly vanished among the spreading foliage of the oaks. And such was the state of affairs at the period at which our story has arrived.

The two ladies, on entering the house, found Mr St Alban alone in the drawing-room. He came forward with the customary smiling alacrity with which he concealed all consciousness of his habitually freezing reception. He had the hide of a rhinoceros, that man, when he thought fit to wear it; and he invariably donned it for his Maudesley Hall visits. From the corner of her eye, Lady Maudesley, after frigidly acknowledging her own share of Mr St Alban's courtesies, saw Geraldine's hand snatched hastily from the detaining fingers of their unwelcome guest, who was not, however, observably discomfited by this oft-repeated rebuff. He began at once to talk volubly on indifferent subjects—the weather, the gradual exodus from London, the dissolution of Parliament and expected busy doings during the

recess,—a time usually devoted to grouse-shooting, yachting, and *far niente*,—a very inconvenient time for factious opposition to come out so strong. Lady Maudesley answered in monosyllables—Geraldine not at all; and when Sir Ralph's voice was heard 'in the hall, both made it their excuse for leaving the apartment. The greeting which now took place was neither warm nor unembarrassed,—certainly did not shew that unreserved confidence of affection which ought to have subsisted between those three. But yet, that man's eyes were blind with tears as he took his daughter for one instant to his heart; and mother and child knew that, after his fashion, and from the depth of that same wildly-beating organ, he loved them both. What grosser passion, then, has power to neutralise that holy impulse? Can it be fear of individual man? Ralph Maudesley has given proof ere now of being physically no coward. Fear of the world's opinion? He braves its very worst by treading in his present course. It cannot be that an evil influence so shadowy and so formless can endure. There is but a cloud over and a mist between the man, his wife, and child. When shall the sun arise which shall scatter that cloud and disperse that mist? Watch on and faint not. Resist still that loathsome dream which, like some foul nightmare, would fain shroud your senses. The night has lasted long,—a stormy darkness that has banished healthful slumber,—but the dawn may even now be glimmering in the east.



## CHAPTER V.

### CALPE.

THE scene once more changes; and, by the seventy-times-seven-league power of our author's stride, a power extending, we would fain trust, to our readers, if they but willingly surrender their fancy to our guidance, we transport ourselves to the sunny shores of the blue Mediterranean. Once more to thy rocky slope, O Calpe! and the muse strives to impart her most sparkling essence to the ink which flows from our pen, for we love thee, scene of our youth's early freshness, and would paint thee, not as now we might look upon thee, but as once in days long, long gone by, when we saw but the deep blue of thy glorious heavens, and the far line of their watery mirror melting on the bright horizon, and believed not in the clinging damp of the black Levanter, nor felt the grinding dust and the sharp flint edges over which we unhaltingly trod! Many years have passed since last we bade thy cliffs adieu, nor would we revisit them now to mourn over the grave of sensations which can never return! But by the cheery light of our own Scottish fireside, and by a light more cheery still, that of young faces little dreamed of in those early

days, we love to sit and ponder over rose-coloured memories of what never had substantial existence,—bright, fantastic visions of our joyous spring-time! Some such mood we now invoke to aid us, while we proceed with this portion of our tale.

*Ay de mi!* what fairy ground we seemed to tread on in those days!—what a halo of romance, as it were, draped the rugged form of that bare old rock! Not that it was so bare, either. We remember on a certain February morning, no matter how long ago, coming on the deck of the old *Boyne* transport, (it had cast anchor in the bay during the night,) and fancying the garden of Eden lay stretched before us. Let us climb the old pathway, survey the scene, and strive to paint it. Below us, right beneath, lies the broad Alameda with its fringe of trees, and baked, sun-dried surface, relieved by the shade of pleasant gardens on the southern side. Straight before us we behold, quivering through the hot haze of the noontide sun, the mirror-like expanse of the bay, scarce rippled as yet by the gentle breeze from the west, which is seen stealing in deeper blue, flecked with white, round Cabrita Point. One or more huge line-of-battle ships probably sit slumbering on the still surface of the deep, but there are few to be seen of the small pleasure craft which at times enliven the scene, for it is almost a dead calm. But wait a bit. Yonder, as we have said, comes the breeze, and ere it has time to ruffle the whole surface of the bay, the little gunter-rigged vessels will be seen emerging from their retreats. I was sure of it. Turn your glass that way, towards the new mole,

do you see that little green-and-black craft moving out under the sweeps? That is old Gilby of the 107th; and when once that craft has fair way upon her—catch her if you can. Across the bay lie sleeping in the blaze of sunlight the white buildings of Algeciras, sleep by the by being the normal state of that town, and any little temporary awakening to be looked upon as quite exceptional. Stretching thence inland, we behold the brown Spanish hills, also mellowed and softened in the rich warm haze, with deep, sombre pine forests standing out in a sort of dark relief from the more tender green of the olive and citron groves, these last generally surrounding buildings of a dazzling white—and thus is the view filled up to the west and north-west; while the mountain ranges which stretch eastward towards Ronda and the Sierra Nevada assume an aspect of much more rugged grandeur. Beyond the little town of San Roque, which sits perched on an eminence about four miles due north from the lines, the eye lingers to drink in the wondrous beauty of the far-famed cork wood, than which no park scenery even in Great Britain can lay claim to greater loveliness. The cork wood—let us give it a few words of special notice. A wood indeed, and a noble one! Mile upon mile of glade and forest, patches of verdant flower-spangled mead and tangled thorny brake, whence, however, bursts no wild melody of carolling birds, but the ceaseless chirp of myriads of the locust tribe, unknown in northern latitudes; and the rustling, bright-eyed lizard, and lazy, basking iguana, glance like flashes of green light across the sun-browned sward. Every now and then,

also, breaking through the dense array of gnarled trunks and spreading branches, covered with foliage resembling that of the oak, long vistas display to view stretches of valley-land, diversified by brown hill and silvery stream, and contribute to form a *tout ensemble* of which a Spaniard might justly be proud—had he energy to be proud of aught but his pedigree, which is a curse to him, and his national glory, which is a lie.

At a further advanced period of the year, the scene will lose somewhat of its charm in the freshness of turf and foliage; but there will remain a sufficiency of dreamy beauty to enthrall the senses and linger on the memory of listless wanderers from yon grim fortress, escaping for a brief hour from its monotonous thralldom. And the season is stealing round when the lately dormant energies of the expatriated Anglo-Saxons will revive, braced by the cool autumn breezes; when their hearts will leap to the joyous cry of the hounds, now only heard at *réveille* by jaded wight on out-picket duty at the parched "North Front." Here he has worn away the few dark hours of guard, courting slumbers which refreshed not, and hurling curses, loud, frequent, and deep, at the fly-tribe, ever ready to answer, with multitudinous buzzing chorus, each toss of his restless limbs. But tired nature, we will suppose, has given in at last, and something like profound repose descends upon the captain's system, when lo! Queen Mab, in her worst guise, as the Night Hag, sits at his ear. And now his dreaming fancy revels free in the wild and

fantastic. He is taking "a header" from O'Hara's tower into the waters beneath; (fourteen hundred feet sheer down;) inexplicably saved from this ere he reaches the sharp-pointed rocks which, instead of the crisp waves he expected, frowningly await his advent, behold him flying in unspeakable terror before a legion of stamping, tearing, bellowing bulls, mad with fury, rushing onwards for the gory *corrida*—presto! he is snatched from this fate, too; and now a feeling of deep depression pervades his fancy. Ah! what is this? Somehow he has been and "done it." He is married! How or to whom he knows not, but the dawning fact is palpable to his dreaming senses. Horror! this is too much for Somnus; he awakes, and has scarcely time to bless himself, when a flash illumines the dusky guard-room for an instant, and the report of the morning gun rolls crashing down the rocky steep. *Caramba!* joyful is he at heart, when, through the opened door, the fresh sea-breeze, herald of the sun, already lighting up the distant silver line of the Mediterranean, kisses with cool lip his fevered brow, and his eye rests lovingly on the long gray shadows, making brighter the gorgeous strips of light between; but soon, too soon, to be merged in one unbroken mass of scorching radiance. Sufficient for him is the joy of the moment; and, albeit regardless of the strict letter of his duty, which by no means emancipates him just yet, he casts one impatient look towards the "Devil's Tower" in search of the subaltern who, well he knows, will not relieve him on his post for the next two

hours—then strides, muttering reckless disregard of consequences, over the crisp dewy turf towards the newly-opened gates of the fortress.

But we digress from our ground, if not from our subject, for the former is the mighty cork wood of Southern Andalusia, scene of much enjoyment and more wild sylvan revelry. Yes, bound are we to admit, the latter not seldom exceeded, and even extinguished the former; for much occasionally sprung therefrom which was mad in performance and painful in consequence, nor would we linger on this theme; enough lies in these few words to call to the memory of many now living (some of whom, perhaps, may scan these pages) episodes which we care not, from our sober retirement, to send forth to the public eye. “Boys will be boys,”—dull platitude,—sad truth! “A short life and a merry one!” Alas! short indeed must be the merriment; but who shall say how long it may please Heaven to spin out the period of unavailing regrets! *Basta!* To our narrative—we have worn out our reader’s patience, and the nib of our patent “Mordan” together.

It is breakfast-time—say ten o’clock—and in and about the messhouse of the 179th Regiment of foot, lounge various groups of officers. There is no morning parade—there never is at this season—and *far niente* is the very decided order of the day. A distant sound of martial music proclaims that guard-mounting has just come off, and that the troops are marching for their different places of ward. There are rather more than the usual number of warriors this morning at the breakfast mess, for the packet

arrived from England with mails last night, and a vast pile of correspondence lies, or lay a few minutes ago, on the side-table of the reception room, for recognition and removal by its several owners. These are addressed in all sorts of hands—bluff masculine, delicate feminine, insidiously, horribly smooth clerk-like, (with a wafer these last, and they are caught up and bundled out of sight as quickly as possible;) but at last the whole pile is cleared away, and there is leisure to devote to the public news. To a stranger entering the precincts of the reception-room the *coup d'œil* is peculiar. Little can he descry but a species of irregular screen of newspapers, the trousers and boots of the perusers thereof protruding from beneath, and an occasional thin stream of bluish vapour rising gently here and there from behind it. Over this, however, on its becoming apparent that a stranger has appeared, various physiognomies of divers ages and degrees of comeliness will make themselves visible for just such space of time as may permit a sort of courteously-curt recognition of the new-comer's advent. Then he will infallibly be offered breakfast and a newspaper, the present holder of that most in demand readily surrendering it, with the understanding that he retains first after-claim.

In the British army, (placing courtesy to strangers out of the question,) brotherhood, cordial and sincere, is the rule, a bad understanding the exception. In the 179th, this was peculiarly the case. One reason for this (the first and strongest) lay in the character and disposition of the commanding-officer. Firm and resolute in points of dis-

cipline, and highly tenacious of the rights accorded to his position by birth and rank, there was yet no weakness incidental to the period of youth towards which he was not tolerant and forgiving,—saving any, and the slightest, infraction of the rules of gentlemanly conduct. To say that even towards this he was “unforgiving,” were to use a term which is inapplicable; true contrition for a fault, no matter of what gravity, was generally sufficient literally to expunge the same from Colonel Lascelles Morley’s memory; but an officer guilty of one of the above class, to effect that end, had required of him not only professions of repentance, but, further, such a period of unwavering subsequent perseverance in the right path, as proved his defection therefrom to have been an error of the head, not a fault of the heart.

In the next place, those whom fortune had favoured with larger means than their brother officers, were not the sort of men to presume upon that circumstance, and endeavour to play Grand Turk in consequence; thus driving such as chose not to submit to their sway, to rally round some sturdy democrat of the mess, who might have made up by rough independence of spirit or combativeness of disposition for the lack of worldly means wherewith to shine in the eyes of his more weak-minded messmates. But we have seen corps in which two parties were formed in this manner before now.

Furthermore, and lastly, there was not a single married man in the regiment with the exception of the staff. Nay, growl not, ye indignant Benedicts of the British army, but



rather reflect, and own that, ere ye indued the flowery chains (to you ever-blooming) of matrimony, yourselves all, more or less, upheld the very doctrines ye are now prone to condemn. The empty chairs at the mess *après-dîner* on the evening of Jones's "tea-fight,"—the boating-party to the "Second River" knocked on the head because Brown *would* go, carrying Thompson the pliant along with him to Robinson's picnic at the cork-wood convent,—the altered demeanour of Smith, erstwhile friend of your bosom, after meeting at Green's "carpet hop,"—confound him!—young Fanny White of the roguish eye and winning, silvery accents,—have these, or such as these, at no time been the subject of your stern anathemas?

But let us hasten to shift our ground in orderly retreat, conscious of the gathering columns of assault preparing on every side to hurl us from our exposed position.

The news had been pretty well digested and partly discussed, and papers were beginning to be laid yawningly aside, when the entrance of a somewhat peculiar figure occasioned some slight stir among at least the junior part of the assemblage. It was difficult to say what might be the precise age of the new-comer. His bushy hair, beneath a regimental forage-cap strapped tightly under his double chin, was nearly quite white, but his cheeks were ruddy, and the spectacles which he wore had evidently been indued to aid a natural defect of vision in the restless and somewhat fierce black eyes which peered through them. He was clad in a shooting-coat and waistcoat of some grayish stuff; a high military stock tightly encircled his throat

and disappeared at the top under his jawl; his trousers were of regimental pattern and were covered with dust at the foot, as were his short, square-toed boots. He paused in the centre of the room, and stood with his hands in his pockets, and the tip of his tongue moistening the surface of his upper lip, looking sternly at no one in particular, but, as it were, ready to turn savagely on any one who might presume to address him jocularly. An incautious subaltern soon gave him the opportunity for which he waited.

“Well, Burton, how did you get on on guard?”

“Ough!” was the only answer, the respondent wheeling at the same time abruptly round on a pivot, so as to turn his shoulder to the interrogator. Sounds of stifled cachinnation were heard here and there. No one venturing to repeat the above experiment, Captain Julius Burton bethought him on his part of a plan of attack. Fixing his eye on the centre of the ceiling whence hung a very handsome bronze chandelier, the captain gave utterance to the following mysterious sentence—

“It’s the 6th of the month.”

There was an immediate restless movement throughout the room. Well knew the inmates thereof what the oracle portended. A few laughed out undisguisedly, some echoed their mirth after a rather uneasy fashion, and a considerable number hastily assumed their forage-caps and left the room. Captain Burton’s object was partly gained, but he was in no humour to leave the work incomplete, and, to use his own expression, there were still “too many in it.”

He advanced with short, swift steps to the corner where hung the bell and gave it a lusty pull.

"Morley's playin' the divil about them accounts," murmured he, by way of information to the room in general. The mess waiter here made his appearance at the doorway.

"Why the divil are the mess and wine books not on the table?"

"The messman hasn't got them all made up yet, sir. They'll be ready in a few minutes."

"Who's goin' to wait here for them all day? Bring them to my quarters as soon as they're ready, and—and—Hunter."

The man lingered at the door, "Sir?"

Captain Julius Burton looked round upon the junior officers who still lingered, those whose withers were unwrung—who, in other words, had paid their mess-bills, or were ready to do so. The captain glared upon them.

"I can tell you, gentlemen, you had better be lookin' sharp, if you've any prisoners. The bugle was goin' as I came round the corner, ten meenits ago."

"The devil it was! Has the colonel gone up to the orderly-room?"

"Yiss."

There was an immediate rush of two-thirds of those who remained towards the door. Burton's features relaxed somewhat.

"*At last*," said he, which was by way of qualifying his last assertion, and was followed by a slight muttering,

amidst much hearty laughter, from those who had not thought it necessary to retreat.

"Hunter," repeated the captain.

"Sir," responded the mess waiter, who knew well what was required of him, and had lingered about the doorway.

"A bottle of soda-water,"—(this very loud; then, with a few hurried steps towards the slowly-retreating *Ganymede*, and in low accents,)—"with a little brandy."

The officers present hid their countenances behind newspapers; then there followed the pop and the gurgle, and the "Hah!" which followed the refreshing libation. It was no small joke to see Burton take a class of soda-water and brandy, so divers faces peered over their screens. The captain was standing with the two-thirds-empty glass in his hand, making faces, as if he had just swallowed a dose of physic. "Bad luck to them hot nights on guard!" murmured he, in much more good-humoured tones than before. Burton was an Irishman, a character; not a *very* estimable one, perhaps, in a general point of view; but he had his good points. Some were inclined to doubt it, and to stamp him as a mere selfish, cold-hearted sycophant and sensualist. But *we* have seen his good points shine forth at rare intervals, have even received kindness from him when it did not put him out of his way; and *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is a good old maxim, which might be extended to the living. We may further state, in explanation of the above scene, that the captain had been, by virtue of his professed tastes and assumed capability,

elected perpetual president of the regimental mess committee and manager of the finance department. In the meantime, those officers who had fled from old Burton's assaults on various grounds, slowly sauntered towards the place of duty indicated by that worthy's apocryphal bugle sound. Not long shall any matter, however grave, weigh on the spirits of the British subaltern. That which had been the cause of their hurried evaporation from the dreaded presence formed now the subject of much mirthful badinage.

"Look out for yourselves, boys," quoth a thin light-haired youth with a long nose, and a rather swaggering gait; "I saw from the corner of my eye the books of fate going up to old Julius's quarters."

"And he's as savage as ——," (a place unnameable to ears polite,) quoth the assistant-surgeon, who was a countryman of Burton's. "He'll have us all up before Morley, every wan iv us, by Japers."

"What! Bally——, you don't mean to say it's not convenient?"

"Faith it is not; but I'm afther expecting it every day—by the packet but one after the next."

"Why, hang it, man," pursued he of the sandy locks, "you were 'afther going to town to look for it' yesterday, you said."

"So I was; but I was afther comin' back without it."

The laughter which accompanied this colloquy was here interrupted by the approach of an individual who emerged from the gateway of Europa Pass. This was a well-known

character, and our friends with one accord, after their custom, prepared for "chaff."

"Hallo, Rubé! whither away with the cushions?"

The person thus addressed was a tallish, thin figure, with a swarthy complexion, short black hair, very keen dark eyes, and lantern jaws. The latter must have nearly met inwardly at times, as he sucked gravely at an obstinate-looking cigar. He had on a straw hat, and was dressed in an old check shooting-coat, evidently not made to order, with sporting buttons, several of them absent without leave, his nether integuments, which fitted somewhat closely to his attenuated shanks, being, of dirty nankeen. These did not reach beyond the top of his ankle-bones, and the limbs they concealed were a little bent in the form of a circumflex. Soiled white cotton socks and a pair of very ancient slippers completed his attire. He had been hurrying past with a touch of the hat and some mumbled expression of deference; but, on being thus accosted, stopped abruptly with a kind of groan, and proceeded with shrug and grimace to answer the queries addressed to him.

"I take them to Mr Braybrooke of the artillery, sar," said he, glancing at the articles in question, which he carried, one under each arm.

"Well, Rubé, you are met at a lucky moment for *you*," said Lieutenant Woodcock, the youth with the nose above mentioned; "here's the doctor expecting no end of dollars by the packet but one after the three next; and he's going to refurnish his quarters."

The Jew did not betray any great amount of enthusiasm

at the intelligence thus imparted. "Well, sar," said he, slowly, "I furnish them—you tell me what you require, sar."

"Don't ask me for any testimonials, that's all," quoth Captain Francis Wilmot, a tall and strikingly-handsome young man, who was much the least mirthful of the party, though the expression of gravity seemed scarcely natural to his countenance. He had left the messroom on learning that the colonel had gone up to barracks; but there were certainly no money embarrassments on his mind, and indeed none, even of his most intimate friends, knew the reason of the cloud upon his usually bright visage. "Don't refer to me, Rubé, for a character, as long as that looking-glass stands on my dressing-table. I'm not very handsome, perhaps; but the left corner of my mouth is not on a line with my right eyebrow, either."

The Jew's interest was awakened in a moment. Captain Wilmot's favour was worth retaining, so the former went through a series of pantomimic evolutions intended to represent grief, astonishment, remonstrance. "You not like the looking-glass? I change it, sar; I change it to-day for a beautiful one, Captain Wilmot. Oh, I not des'-point a gentleman, sar, you see."

"Well, look out and do it, or hang me if I don't go to old Manasses, and see what he can do."

"Pff—ff—ff—ff!" (We cannot do justice in spelling to this interjection, which attended the slow expulsion from Rubé's lips of a very thin stream of smoke.) "You go to Manasses? You not employ him long, sar; Manasses

come to *me*, sar—get furniture—then hire him to officers. But you wait, sar,—I shew you,—’m—m—m—m!’ (Here his tone changed from intense scorn to one of congratulatory assurance, the above sound attending the replacement of his cigar between his lips, and receiving significance from about a score of nods in rapid succession.)

“Well, Rubé,” quoth assistant-surgeon M‘Shane, “behave yourself dacent, an’ there’s no sayin’ what good luck may come to ye; remember the fortune ye made out of Swanchester—the Honourable Mr Swanchester of the Bally-James-Duff Blazers.” This remark had the looked-for effect.

Dashing the two cushions on the ground, with a force which raised a small cloud of dust round the party, the Jew darted in front of them, and commenced to rave and gesticulate like a maniac. He brought his shoulders above the level of his ears—almost to the crown of his straw hat; he expanded his lean arms and hands, as if drawing together a bundle of garments; he clenched all but two fingers; he clenched all but one; he re-expanded the whole five; he closed them, bringing the tips into an apex, as one presents a child with a lollipop, under the very noses of his auditors.

“A—a—a—an’r’ble Swanchester!” he snarled forth, bringing out each word with a sort of drawl of intense wrath. “I tell you, sar, he ruin me, he rob me, he tell me he cannot get leave of absence—he go that night—he go straight on board the steamer, sar,—owe me hun—dred



—and—feef—ty daller, sar! I make shirts for him, sar—he take cigars and jewelry—he hire furniture—six daller a week, sar,—I get him a piano, sar!! and he go away—owe me hun—dred—and—feefy—five daller! Ah! I like to see A—a—a—an'r-ble Swanchester!”

Then diving at his cushions, he rehoisted them under one arm, and started off towards Europa Flats, muttering to himself, and gesticulating with hand and shoulder, as far as the ears and eyes of his much-gratified patrons could follow him.

The chorus of hearty laughter which followed this performance being ended, the group of officers pursued their way up to barracks, where they were met by Lieutenant and Adjutant Campley, and by him enlightened as to the fact that old Burton had sold them, no colonel being there, or expected to come, a note having, in fact, arrived from the latter postponing the orderly-room business till a later day, he being occupied with friends.

Lieutenant and Adjutant Campley was, as type of a class, not unworthy of a few words to himself. That gallant man was a Scotchman, had originally enlisted as private in the regiment in which he now served, and had climbed the ladder of promotion to his present position, by dint of steadiness and zeal in the discharge of his duties. It could not perhaps be said that the gallant ex-serjeant-major had thought it worth his while, when raised to the superior grade, to cast aside entirely the style appertaining to his former rank; but he was an excellent officer, had

every detail of his profession at his finger-ends, and could display a good deal of rough good humour, when not "stroked against the hair."

"Hah! hah! hah!" roared the adjutant, when the indignant young gentlemen described the manner in which they had been choused. "I'm d——d if old Julius is not first-rate."

"He's a sulky old beast—that's what he is."

"I'll pay him off yet; I know how to manage it. I've learnt the officers' call on the cornet-à-piston. Just wait till there comes some broiling forenoon!"

"Oh, bigodd," quoth Mr Campley, "that would never do."

"Take a cigar, Campley." The adjutant would accept a cigar, a glass of wine or beer, or a beefsteak, at any given hour of the day, and it was not unfrequently a "paying concern" to the provider thereof—the requital being official blindness on certain well-understood occasions.

"After all, a walk will do us no harm, this fine morning."

"Divil a bit; and that's the way to take it, Wilmot, my man," quoth Campley, smoking lustily.

Wilmot was very popular with that functionary. He was a first-rate officer for his period of service, was always ready to assist Campley in his duties, and was indeed one of the few qualified to undertake such labours. And Campley often dined at the mess as his guest. But Captain Francis Wilmot's superiority to the general run

of young martialists had been palpable from the day of his joining the regiment, five or six years before. On that occasion Colonel Morley had expressed his opinion that "young Wilmot was the best recruit who had joined the 179th for many years;" a judgment confirmed by the adjutant, after his usual fashion, that is, with an oath, "powerful enough," said Lieutenant Wagtayle, the regimental *bel esprit*, "to tilt his chaco over on the wrong side of his head." The latter officer was in the habit of affirming that he never came away from a colloquy to which the gallant adjutant had been a party, without a vision floating before his mind's eye of the benevolent recording angel "going at it" with yellow soap and a scrubbing brush, in the hopeless effort to expunge a fine *specimen* of Campley's just come to hand; and this piece of wit was applauded by no one more heartily than by that worthy man himself, who had never heard of "Lawrence Sterne," nor indeed troubled his brain anent angels of any sort, benevolent or the reverse.

"I'm d——d if the scrubbin' brush is not wanted there," he would subsequently remark, when occasion drew forth some expression of superfluous energy from a comrade; and thus honest Wagtayle's *jeu d'esprit* became advanced to the dignity of a household word with the 179th Regiment of Foot.

"Who'll take a turn up the rock, as far as the signal station?" asked Captain Wilmot.

"Not I"—"Nor I," and "Do you think I'm a salamander?" were the various answers he received.

"Augh! I wouldn't mind goin' wid ye," said the doctor, "but I'm bound for the town."

"I see; after lookin' for it—eh, old fellow? Well, here goes, then, for a solitary clamber; *hasta rivederse!*" with which Spanish farewell phrase, Captain Francis, not ill-pleased, being in the vein to commune with his thoughts, started off in the direction of the precipitous "Mediterranean stairs."

Of the remainder of the party, the majority at once retraced their steps to the mess-house, where, indignation eclipsing dread, they burst in upon Captain Julius with very little ceremony. That worthy was seated in an arm-chair cheek by jowl with a congenial spirit, a brother captain, rejoicing in the sobriquet of "the old man," in facetious reference to his temperament rather than to his years. The two looked up from their newspapers with cloudy brows; but the overawing influence was gone by for the present. So go ahead and spare not, ye happy youngsters! Fling wide the windows, whistle to the dogs, shy nuts and fragments of biscuit to the little chattering ape on the parapet—heed not the two silent figures in the two easy-chairs, who, haply, look back upon the days of *their* heart's freshness, and envy while they growl!

## CHAPTER VI.

### OLD FRIENDS AND NEW.

IT has always been rather a mystery to us, that the denizens of the great fortress of Gibraltar availed themselves so little of the pleasing resources offered by the rock itself, in the way of escape from the enervating influence of the summer sun. A very short walk along the very tolerable pathway leading to the eastern side brought Captain Wilmot within range of cool shades, whence he could at leisure and in comfort feast his eye on an unrivalled marine view. He had turned a corner which at once introduced him to perfect solitude, the effect of which was unbroken almost by a sound ; indeed the shrill scream of a small species of hawk which inhabited the clefts in the face of the precipice far above, and the distant shout or song from the deck of some stray felucca, six or seven hundred feet beneath, seemed, mellowed and subdued as they were by the space between, to render the sense of solitude more profound. He could see one or two of the latter by leaning over the low wall whence, right down to the water's edge, the unbroken precipice descended, and they looked like the toy vessels of a child, and their human freight, whose

voices ascended to his ear, were but specks of red, or white, or dusky brown. We are aware of the cause which rendered Frank Wilmot's meditations gloomy. He had left home, on returning from his last leave of absence, in a depressed frame of mind, which subsequent correspondence with his sympathising friends had failed to relieve; and under the circumstances, anything like direct communication with the lady of his affections was out of the question. His sisters, by right of office, consolers and *confidantes* in such a case as this, were unable even to say that he had been inquired after, or that the mention of his name had been received with anything like flattering interest, since his departure, by the inmates of Maudesley Hall. Sooth to say, there had been very little opportunity for anything of the sort, for it had become the decided policy of the latter to preserve a respectful distance from those of Wilmot's Tower; and this being evident, it naturally excited indignation in the hearts of the seniors; none the less that it was mixed up with surprise and mystification. Thus, matters remained in as unsatisfactory a position as possible, and were likely to get worse day by day. Was poor Frank, then, really to be compelled to awaken from his dream of bliss? He had been roughly jolted, and all was in a chaos now; but he shrunk from the idea of the vision being totally dispelled. And how? Good heavens! say what we will, we would rather see the jewel we once thought our own and had learned to prize beyond existence, dashed to atoms, resolved into the elements, than glittering on another and an undeserving brow.

Thus pondering, it was with a feeling of impatient annoyance that, on coming in sight of the platform, which commands a view towards the north and east, and looks down upon the sandy shore of Catalan Bay, three figures were visible, seated on the low parapet of the one-gun battery. Stifling the last choke which had been rising in his throat, and moistening his eyelids,—poor Frank! he was very young, remember,—he now prepared to pass by as rapidly as he might, when the sound of his footsteps attracted the notice of one of the party. He turned round, and displayed the expressive and good-humoured countenance of Colonel Lascelles Morley. At the risk of being excessively tiresome to the general reader, we feel ourselves impelled to devote a few words to this remarkable man. Well we know we need not sue for pardon to those who had the privilege of his friendship. Not immaculate was he; it may be that, had he been so, his friends would have loved him less; for if ever there was one whose failings leaned to virtue's side, that man was Lascelles Morley. A warm-hearted man, and gifted with a large soul—not destined long to follow out that career which talent and circumstance made to look so promising. We remember his brief *epithalamium*, from the lips of one upon whose brow death already was affixing his seal. It was in the melancholy camp of Aladyn in Bulgaria, where cholera had marked the British army to furnish many a victim, and the dead march ushered in each dank, still morning like a ghastly *réveillé*, that news had just arrived which struck a deeper chill into hearts which already were chill and dark enough. “Ah,

man!" said poor F——, supporting his tottering limbs as best he might upon that stick which his trembling fingers could grasp but a few short days longer,—“Ah, man! there's a fine-hearted fellow gone!” There was something inexpressibly affecting in those words, coming from those ashy lips, the feeling which suggested them sending a feeble quiver through the gaunt frame which but yesterday had been so burly. It was spirit calling to departed spirit, “Wait for me; I will be with you soon. In our earthly mansions we have held pleasant commune together; together let us stand before our Judge!”

Among Morley's amiable traits may be numbered a fondness for exercising hospitality to such strangers as the course of avocation, or erratic propensities brought within range of his civilities. He might indeed be termed the *Amphitryon*, *par excellence*, of the mess, and perhaps, by virtue of his position as commanding-officer, not to mention his large private means, something of the sort might not unreasonably have been expected of him; but it was the way in which he did it which illustrated the character of the man.

“We want you to come and dine with us while you are here, and to make use of the mess whenever you have nothing better to do,” he would say to the gratified tourist. The consequence of this was, that many are to be met with at the present day who love to bear testimony to the generous hospitality of the regiment collectively, whereas, in strict truth, it must be said that, but for the Honourable Lascelles Morley, they might too probably



have roamed the garrison, finding all barren from Dan to Beersheba, i.e., from Bayside Barrier to Europa Point.

"Whither away, O Timon of Athens?" was the interrogatory which now met Frank's ear, in those cheery tones which were antagonistic to gloom.

Frank stammered and felt abashed. He had been pondering over certain matters with an earnestness which made him almost feel as if overheard in a soliloquy; and, sooth to say, his commanding-officer was not one likely to afford him much sympathy in such misfortunes.

"Colonel Marston and Captain Thornfield," pursued the latter, introducing his companions. "This is Captain Francis Wilmot, a youth erstwhile of sparkling wit and vivacious humour, but lately, to the grief of his friends, much given to silence and solitary musings."

Frank could not but feel interested in the two thus presented to his notice; indeed he thought he had seldom looked upon more noteworthy individuals. The taller of the two had made, somewhat to his surprise, a hurried step forward upon hearing his name, and had half extended his hand, but he drew back with a sort of apologetic bow, and reseated himself on the parapet, though he continued attentively to peruse the young man's features for a few moments. Frank's hasty survey shewed him a tall military-looking figure with a long dark beard and silky moustaches, both streaked with silver; a set of pale and very handsome features, and large deep-gray eyes, the expression of which was serious almost to the extent of melancholy. Frank thought for a moment

that he was like somebody he had seen, which was probable enough in such a place, and he took little note of the circumstance. The other and shorter of the twain being our old friend Basil, we need not now stop to describe him. He had given a sort of bluff, good-humoured nod in answer to Frank's salutation, and returned to his occupation of gazing towards Catalan Bay.

Frank thought it necessary to say something, and began of course according to conventional requirement—

"The weather is beautiful, though warm."

"It is so; one can calculate in this climate upon a little sunshine at this period of the year."

The voice of the taller stranger was a pleasant one; strangely enough, a dim impression floated across Frank's mind that he had heard something like that also before.

"And the view from this part of the rock is very fine."

"Finer than almost any I have met with—and I have travelled a good deal."

"I like the prairies best," quoth Captain Thornfield; "a good horse on a broad prairie—that's the thing to make the blood dance in one's veins!"

"A good horse!—there I can sympathise with you, Thornfield," quoth Colonel Morley; "but a stiff Leicestershire country will satisfy me, on a cloudy December morning."

"To chase a fox!" said Captain Thornfield, with a slight grimace; "give me a herd of buffaloes, colonel."

"All according to taste, my dear Thornfield. I acknowledge having at least half an eye to the good dinner and bottle of claret after the run."

"Ah! ça," quoth the man-at-arms, laughing, "far be it from me to undervalue *them*."

"But a prairie dinner is not necessarily a bad one—eh, Basil?" suggested Colonel Marston.

"Inshallah! no, nor a scanty one neither—if luck be not very bad."

"You have travelled in America, then?" asked Frank. "North or South?"

"Both," replied Captain Thornfield. "As for travelling, I don't know. I was adjutant and riding-master in a corps of Texan Rangers, and thereafter colonel-commandant of a Yankee militia regiment."

"Really! Then why not style yourself by the senior rank?"

"For the reason which made me quit the service, captain—a dislike to the companionship it entailed upon me. Colonel! *Caramba!*—to mate with a scum of loafers, gamblers, whisky-barkeepers! The last *respectable* commission I held was that of captain in the service of her most Catholic majesty yonder;" and the soldier motioned with his hand towards the Spanish lines; "and that was nothing much to boast of."

Frank began to be much interested; and there was a good-humoured *laissez aller* about the tone of the soldier of fortune which encouraged him to proceed. "A strange life! and must have been an eventful one," said he. "You

could relate many a curious episode, Captain Thornfield, if so inclined."

"Perhaps I could, if I had the knack of separating from a mass of things, which are all commonplace enough to me, the few points which might have interest for others. But I have it not; nor can I see what I should gain by the relation, if I had; not much honour, perhaps, and less profit. *Basta!* let them go to oblivion."

"*Andiamos*," broke in Colonel Morley, starting up from the gun-carriage on which he had been sitting; "*Andiamos, caballeros*; time flies, and luncheon is an institution which must be respected."

Frank Wilmot and Thornfield followed the other two. Frank, not usually deficient in tact, had, rather unaccountably, failed to perceive that his chief had designedly broken in upon the thread of conversation, and that the voice of his companion was becoming gloomy and constrained.

"Will you pardon my saying so?" pursued he; "but it appears to me that you are devoting yourself to climbing a ladder, the rounds of which sink from beneath your feet as you attempt to rise."

The man-at-arms did not immediately answer. Frank glanced at his face, and was startled by the expression it wore, which would have been that of deep despondency, but for something savagely stern in the brow and set teeth. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse and low.

"Climb! climb to what? We do not rise, young man, though we may think it, be our course through life what it may. Our goal lies downhill; sooner or later we shall

all meet at the bottom—be our pathway straight or crooked—over sharp flints or flowery greensward.”

Frank felt abashed, and considerably struck, both with the words of his companion and their manner of delivery. The latter, instantaneously recovering his light demeanour, proceeded to fill a short meerschaum pipe, laughing as he did so.

“The rest of my discourse in the afternoon,” said he; and a fragrant cloud of cavendish smoke began to taint, or perfume, (as the reader’s taste may incline,) the pure, still atmosphere. They had now arrived at a point whence the two strangers intimated that their path must for the present diverge, as they had business in the town which lay stretched beneath them in the full blaze of the sun. They had exchanged the deep, shady solitude of the precipitous eastern side for such life as the western slope of the rock presented. Verily it was a dreamy, lethargic sort of life at best. The roll of some far-off drum, the wail of a distant bugle, the quivering neigh of some water-cart mule—these did not disturb the drowsy influence which seemed to pervade the very atmosphere. It was as portrayed by Thomson in his “Castle of Indolence”—

“All these sounds y-blent inclined still to sleep.”

“But luncheon awaits us,” urged Colonel Morley. “Have claret cup and cutlets *à la sauce tomate* no charms?”

“Both are but too tempting; for that reason, my dear colonel, we fly them for the present, that we may with a safe conscience yield us to their fascinations by and by. Your mess hour is seven, I think? I profess, for myself,—

and I think I can answer for Basil,—we had rather not tamper with our appetites till then.”

“It is but one o'clock,” said Colonel Morley, doubtingly; “but you know best what are your powers of abstinence. *Au revoir!* if you will have it so.”

“*Au revoir!* Captain Wilmot, I trust we shall meet you this evening at your hospitable table?”

“Oh! certainly; indeed I should make a point of it,” quoth Frank, who had a vague idea that he owed an *amende* of some sort to Thornfield.

“That is well. I—should be glad to improve our acquaintance, if you will permit me. Colonel Morley tells me you are a —shire man. I—hem—have been in that part of England, and have a few friends there of whose welfare I should be glad to hear.”

The party separated; Frank accompanying his commanding-officer towards the barracks.

“A very remarkable couple,” began the former, fishingly.

“Very good fellows, both,” said Morley, cigar in mouth. “I met them in Seville last year, where they were in excellent society. Marston is a gentleman of breeding and cultivation—that could be seen by any one. And he had very good introductions; not from England—Vienna, or St Petersburg, or somewhere. Thornfield is a rough diamond; a sort of Dalgetty, as far as his avocation goes, but without that worthy’s drawbacks. In fact, they’re both thorough soldiers of fortune, a class of men one seldom meets with now-a-days.”

"At least," interpolated Wilmot, "one does not often find them of that stamp."

"Precisely. By the way, my friend, you had better not be too inquisitive with regard to Thornfield's past career. I had to stop you just now from getting on very tender ground."

"I observed it, thank you, colonel; and I shall be cautious in future. But he is too good-natured to be dangerous, I imagine."

"Don't be too sure of that. Marston gave me a hint once not to press Thornfield on the point of his past life—a wild one, I take it. So just be content with what he chooses to impart, and 'let sleeping dogs lie,' *capitan mio*. Is that Campley yonder? It is; and on the look out for me, evidently. I must indulge him—*addio!* till mess-time," quoth the colonel, turning his steps towards the orderly-room, in front of which indeed loomed the portly figure of Lieutenant Campley. That worthy frequently inveighed against his chieftain's irregular system of business hours; protesting that he "was d——d if he would stand it,"—a phrase the precise import whereof remains to this day an open question with those who overheard it.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A NIGHT AT MESS.

IF we look in upon the mess dinner of the 179th, this evening, it will not much hinder the progress of our story, and may be the means of introducing to notice fresh characters wherewith to enliven it. The daily mess arrangements of that and other regiments are of a very simple character; and a member of the corps sits down to his meal with the usual view of satisfying his natural requirements, and with the expectation of deriving a reasonable amount of benefit from the process. But on the occasion of an entertainment on a large scale, when not only their particular friends are collected round them, but such strangers also as chance may have thrown in their way, and who possess certain claims to collective or individual hospitality; when the thermometer ranges about 80° in the shade, and the mess-room is likely to be well-filled; then we should be inclined to recommend to the hosts of the evening a substantial luncheon at about the second or third hour after noon, in order that they may have full leisure to attend to the wants of their guests. Neither is it always convenient to have to mount guard the following



morning. Make your hospitable arrangements, my dear young friends, with due regard, if ye be wise, to that contingency. You will not mind (under the first-mentioned proviso) receiving as your share a mere scrap from the saddle of English mutton, nor will ye yearn for the breasts of fatted turkeys—a scantily-furnished side-bone will be just the thing; and let not the unceasing round of the mess waiter, napkined flask in hand, too often find your frost-dimmed goblet ripe for replenishment, nor scorn to stretch forth with deprecatory murmur a guardian hand, nor even to consign the glass significantly to the cooler at your elbow. For by this time, under ordinary circumstances, your tongues will be sufficiently loosened, the wheels of your fancy oiled, and a more or less connected sort of eloquence will flow from your lips.

On such an occasion as we have thus faintly shadowed forth, a large party was assembled round the mess-table of the 179th at Europa Point. Among those present, (as the phrase goes,) we observe Colonel Marston, (service unknown,) Captain Basil Thornfield, (do. do.,) and a mixed concourse of officers of the garrison and civilians of divers grades and professions. In spite of a mutual purpose to the contrary, the former gentlemen and Captain Francis Wilmot found themselves separated in the course of the general movement from the reception room, and forced to take possession of seats opposite but somewhat removed from each other. Wilmot now saw, or fancied, that he had been mistaken in supposing he had ever before seen the colonel; and that his was but one of those faces which,

being of a striking description, impress one somehow as being not altogether strange. But he looked much towards him in a sort of involuntary way, and not unfrequently caught his gaze fixed upon himself in return. And now we are compelled to chronicle a rather deplorable weakness (though we protest it was but a temporary one, and short-lived) on the part of Captain Francis. For some time past, indeed since his return from England, some months previously, that young man had shewn a very unusual amount of recklessness in his casual libations. Fortunately he was possessed of too much innate refinement of feeling to admit of this vice encroaching upon him in its grosser form; but the flushed cheek and excited eye, the tongue running away with the judgment, unmeaning mirth and uncalled-for remark—all these had been too often seen and noted by divers half-amused, half-sorrowing friends, Colonel Lascelles Morley among the rest. Two or three times, as the evening wore on, and Frank shewed signs of surrendering himself to the swiftly-consecutive stages of false hilarity, he caught the eye not only of the latter, but of his newly-formed acquaintances of the morning bent gravely upon him. Those two had been abstemious almost to rigour, pleading habits formed from long residence in foreign lands—alas, for Britain!—but we are talking of a day which is gone by—a taste which is defunct and buried, and, save by some salutary example to a happier generation, unwept.

In the meantime the scattered conversation flowed on in various channels.

One knot,—a very noisy one towards the close of dinner,—chiefly composed of subalterns belonging to various regiments, had a professional subject in hand, and they discussed it with much vehemence and occasional jocularly. It appeared that they had, one or two of them, sat as members of a court-martial a few mornings previously, and, fancying themselves out of earshot of the higher authorities, they now prosecuted their discussion to a point where, in the heat of argument, it threatened to trench on the limits of their sworn reticence. There was a difference of opinion upon a point of memory—one young officer insisting that a certain prisoner had received a bad character from his adjutant, another asserting that it had been given as "very good." Had the disputants observed the stern glance which Colonel Morley sent towards them on overhearing the above little discrepancy of account, they certainly would not have gone on to settle the matter quite so flippantly; for "after all it was a bagatelle, a thing of no material consequence whatever."

"What does it signify? There's but one way of dealing with these fellows," quoth Lieutenant Hector M'Quarrel, of the Glen Houlachan Buffs. "Strike a non-commissioned officer—by Jove!"

"And the b—brute was—hic—drunk!" murmured Ensign Swipesley, of the Royal County Bingo; whereat his companions on either side laughed and drummed applause on the table.

"Bosh! There's but one way, as M'Quarrel says, and that's the shortest," summed up, oracularly, Lieutenant

Wellington Duckwater of the last-named regiment. "Putting a man in *chokey*, and sending him to pile shot, is handing over the blackguard's duty to be done by his well-behaved comrade; whereas, scratch his back, and he is on sentry again in a week, and no one the worse but himself, who deserved it. When a man knows that crime will be followed to a certainty by such and such a punishment, he goes into it with his eyes open, and has himself to thank for what he gets."

Plausibly argued, O immaculate Duckwater! Why pet and coddle weak, erring human nature? Behold a semi-savage, ignorant alike of what is vice, what virtue; untaught, uncared for, save by Him who for His inscrutable purposes hands him over for a season to the guidance of his fellow-man; what have we to do with him? Are we our brother's keeper? Talk to him—reason with him—instruct him? Spend months in clearing to his brutalised intellect the difference between good and evil? Bah! lay the lash on his shoulders, and drive the lesson into his hide, while the drum-major counts forty and ten!

And here, with all deference, we would fain interpolate a few words as to the mode in which military tribunals are constituted. The members being taken as they stand on the garrison-duty roster, may not improbably consist, with a few exceptions, of very young, inexperienced men. Be this as it may, the evidence in support of the prosecution having been heard, and the prisoner's defence (we will trust) listened to, the junior member of the court is *first* called upon to pronounce his verdict. And so far, little

harm can be done. In any ordinary case, the matter will have been made clear enough to leave little danger of a wrong finding—nor would the ensign be permitted to give one palpably at variance with the facts laid before him; but when the sentence has to be pronounced, the case is very different. Here, again, the youngest member of the court will be first called upon for his *fat*. And why? Apparently for no other reason than that he may not be "biassed" in his judgment by that of the senior officers present—in other words, that he may not be enabled to derive any guidance from the experience of those accustomed to deal with such matters, and to note the working of different ranges of penalties; putting out of the question their to-be-assumed riper knowledge of human nature. We unhesitatingly affirm, looking back upon our own experience, that, in many instances, very young officers have been actuated by no other wish than to avoid the ridicule consequent upon their giving a sentence totally inapplicable to the nature of the case. Let us remember what it is, and how much it is, those raw young men have, or ought to have, to consider. In the first place, broadly, the class of offence—(many, we fear, stop there)—in the next, all the circumstances attendant upon its commission, as brought out by the evidence for the prosecution—and, thirdly, such extenuating matter (or the contrary) as may have been adduced by the prisoner's own statement in defence, and the testimony as to his former general character, and special precedents. It not unfrequently happens that while all this has been going on, the ensign has been

uneasily consulting the book before him, (D'Aguilar upon Courts-martial,) with the view of discovering what punishment it may be lawful to award. Too often have we seen the young man take refuge from his embarrassment in naming the highest punishment it was in his power to inflict. It is difficult exactly to account for this—British officers are not in the aggregate cruel or heartless, and they would gladly follow a milder lead. It may be that they take the above course in the expectation of their award being modified by the subsequent decisions of the older members. A little reflection will shew how much harm may yet have been done. The *nature* of the punishment—that is, whether it is to be corporal punishment, imprisonment with hard labour, or solitary confinement—having been settled, the next and final proceeding is to *strike an average* from the individual awards of the different members. Often have we witnessed (and experienced) the grave anxiety and regret with which the senior officers have watched the growing unlikelihood of their being able to close the proceedings with what in their matured opinion would be a righteous sentence—one of justice tempered with mercy.

And the remedy is not difficult—a simple reversal of the present system as above explained. Let the senior officer, the president of the court, take the lead, in the case both of verdict and sentence, and so downwards to the youngest of all. And, if possible, let the president “charge the court” in a few words explaining his view of the whole circumstances attendant upon the case. This mode might not be infallible, but it would certainly, in our opinion,

give the man on trial a fairer chance of justice, and would at all events shift a very grave responsibility on to the right shoulders. Perhaps it may be said some officers possess not the power of lucidly explaining their views in this way, and that we are absurd in expecting a soldier to ape the demeanour of a civil judge. All we can say in answer is, that if an officer of mature experience and average education is unable, in a few plain words, to convey his opinion on any case of military dereliction we ever heard of, that officer is unfit for his post.

*Revenons, &c.* The great business of dining, and the still greater of the *après-dîner* is at length at an end. The last notes of "God save the Queen" have long ceased to vibrate in the courtyard without, and the bottle, on the whole, paces languidly round the board. Some have fairly given up transferring any of its contents to their glasses; others begin to wish that they had adopted that plan earlier, and a select few—Rummer Glasse of the County Bingo, Lemmon Peile and Todd de Leydell of the Glen Houlachan—feel the good claret chill on their internal systems, and think lovingly of the usual corrective, to be had with a cigar presently in the anteroom. Therefore to this apartment in a body they repair—some grave, some voluble, all affectionate—and soon the pure atmosphere grows murky with the fumes of Habana. Card tables also are set out, and Captain Toobey Onnars makes the circuit of the room, pack in hand, arranging the rubber and the "cut in." Toobey (who is a good fellow and a gentleman) only interferes in the matter of his own particular table, that of the

recognised whist-players of the garrison ; but a supplementary one will be formed by and by, whereat the points will be lower, and the silent system much less scrupulously observed, and there will be many a wrathful look directed towards it, in the course of the evening, from the whist table proper.

Just before these arrangements were completed on the evening in question, the mess waiter entered the room, bearing a large printed placard, which he presented to Colonel Morley.

“ *Corrida de toros ! Aha !* ” exclaimed the colonel, who, pending the formation of that rubber wherein he delighted, was conversing with Marston, Thornfield, and others—“ *Gran funcion—Malaga, the 12th corriente. We’ll all go, by Jove !* ”

For the colonel’s heart, whereof the door was at all times on the latch, stood now wide open under the influence of good things moderately enjoyed—a state of matters which the ever-watchful juniors were not slow to observe. In an instant an excited group was formed in the chieftain’s vicinity.

“ I should like it. I was not at Ronda this year—took guards for half you fellows. I came off guard this morning, and am clear for a fortnight.” These and such like murmurs were bandied about from one to other.

“ Settle it among yourselves, gentlemen,” quoth the commanding-officer, moving towards the whist table—“ half of you can go—the other half will sustain the credit of the regiment at home ; we’ll talk about it to-morrow. Mean-



time—*vamos, caballeros!*—How do we sit?—you and I Gormansby? *Bueno—bueno!*”

Gormansby was an officer of another corps serving in the garrison. He was fond of whist and good living; was just comfortably obese of person, and possessed tolerably ample means wherewith to gratify his propensities, which might be summed up as a general love of ease, and a determination to make the most of life in a tranquil way. His tastes being also nautical, he owned at the present time a handsome cutter of about thirty-five tons burden, “well found” and efficiently manned, which lay at anchorage in the New Mole Harbour, when not cruising about the Bay and its environs. In this vessel, the *Bittern*, R. Y. S., Captain Gormansby, Julius Burton, and others would make frequent trips, nowhere in particular, just dodging about the neighbouring coasts, with the avowed object, not of bracing their systems in the fresh sea-breeze, but of eating a leg of English mutton, duly consigned to the owner per packet from Southampton, or a leash of particular woodcock from the Spanish sierras.

By the way, honest Burton had just retired with hasty, though rather unsteady, footsteps, and, being met near the doorway (at the posts whereof he clutched) by the ever grave mess waiter, had been assisted up-stairs to his quarters by that functionary, to whom he talked affectionately on the way, addressing him, not by his own name, but by that of a predecessor, who had some time since retired from office, and reverted to his place in the ranks.

Gormansby, before sitting down to whist, held a brief

colloquy with Marston and his friend, the object of which was to form a party for Malaga, to proceed thither in the *Bittern*.

"Much better than pigging it in a filthy Spanish steamer," observed he; "and as for the journey overland, —you may not mind that sort of thing, but such violent gymnastics don't suit my constitution."

"You are very good," replied Marston. "My movements are not quite certain; but if it can be left an open question"——

"I fear I shall scarcely be permitted to do that long—you had better say 'Yes.' The *Bittern* has sleeping accommodation for six—I never take more than four, if I can help it. Wilmot, will you have a berth?"

"With pleasure, Gormansby, and many thanks," at once replied Captain Francis, who had been standing near with a sort of fixed smile on his rather flushed features. "Hurra for the *corrida de toros*!"

"Ah"—— said Gormansby, who loved not excitement of speech or demeanour. "Marston," continued he, turning round as he moved towards the card table, "*do* you say 'Yes?'"

The latter gentleman had exchanged a few hasty words with Thornfield, who leant against the chimney-piece, smoking.

"I think we may, as you are so obliging," said he. "I find Thornfield and I can so arrange our plans."

"Then," quoth Gormansby, sitting down to his rubber, "the party is formed. Start on the 10th—Saturday; a

good day for a start. Now, Morley, are we ready? Your deal, partner," and the absorbing business of the evening commenced.

"It is getting rather late," said a voice in Wilmot's ear. He started and turned round; it was Colonel Marston. "Thornfield and I are on the move homewards. Will you walk with us so far? Your quarters, I think, are at the cottages beyond the pass gate?"

"Eh? Ah—well—yes, by Jove, I don't mind. Stupid work this for a fellow who don't play cards. And I never do. I promised—hem—hem"—

"Right. Come along. It is a beautiful night; such a one as we never see in our bleak northern latitudes at home. And I want to talk to you about that home."

Frank afterwards declared there was a sort of quiet command about his new friend's accents which he felt it nearly impossible to resist. So, in spite of sundry remonstrances from those around, bearing vague reference to prospective supper, (whereat Frank hesitated, Marston shook his head, and Thornfield laughed outright,) the three gentlemen, Frank in the centre, with a vague feeling of being somehow in custody, left the mess-house.

The moon shone on the surrounding scenery, the steep rocks on the one hand, and the calm, silvery waters on the other, with a brilliancy like that of day; a lovely scene altogether; but our friends took little note of it, being occupied with other thoughts.

Marston was nearly silent, in spite of his professed wish to talk over home matters with Frank Wilmot, and Thorn-

field, having discarded the cigar he was smoking in deference to mess rules, for his beloved pipe, sent clouds of vapour wreathing about his head ; but Frank had words enough, such as they were, for all three. Totally forgetting that he had but Marston's own word for his acquaintance with the place of his birth, the young man at once selected that for his topic, and rambled from one point to another, till he nearly approached the very tender ground of his family matters. The few words dropped by Marston here and there set at rest, indeed, the question of that gentleman's knowledge of the locality ; but Frank, who had originally taken that knowledge for granted, was in a state to feel no surprise at any amount of its development, nor to trouble himself with inquiries as to its origin. On the contrary, he was only pleased to find some one to whom he might enlarge on the subject nearest his heart, with a good chance of being understood, at the same time intending, with what he deemed consummate art, poor lad, to hover round the forbidden precincts of his secret grief, and keep its actual limits sacred from other footsteps than his own. Marston, indeed, seemed rather to discourage any undue confidence on his part, and had assumed a position rather in advance of the other two ; but Frank, who was now fairly allowing his feelings to run away with his discretion, had a fast hold of Thornfield's arm, and was treating that personage to a rapid and comprehensive, if not very collected, detail of the reasons which drove him to seek oblivion in the wine cup. He had arrived at this point in consequence of a stumble, wherein the captain's

stalwart arm had been interposed just in time to save him from a prostration, and which incident somehow conveyed to the youth's mind a suspicion that he had certainly "taken too much," and that his companions must be aware of the fact; so he set himself solemnly, and with moistened eyelids, to account for his backsliding.

Poor Frank! The man-at-arms, to all appearance, listened gravely, but as the details were poured forth in his ear, a less darkened perception than that of the penitent might have remarked an occasional convulsion which agitated the burly frame of the "father confessor." At last, when they had long passed by the entrance to Frank's quarters, unnoticed by him in the midst of his harrowing narrative, Colonel Marston being still a few paces in advance, and the young man was professing, with quivering voice, his fixed resolve to leave the service, and seek a soldier's grave in some remote region,—in aid of which purpose he besought Captain Thornfield's counsel,—that gentleman, suddenly dropping Frank's arm, staggered to the side of the road, threw himself upon a bank, and went off into a fit of ungovernable laughter.

Marston turned round somewhat startled. Poor Frank stood transfixed with indignant bewilderment, while peal upon peal of merriment shook the bluff sides of the soldier of fortune.

"Basil!—Basil!"—remonstrated Marston, in quiet accents, though a smile might have been seen in the moonlight just to hover round his lips; "hush! my good fellow; you will alarm the guard."

"I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon, Captain Wilmot, from the bottom of my heart," quoth the soldier, wiping his eyes, and rising from his seat by the roadside. "I am a brute; but I swear to you that the idea of me, Basil Thornfield, being made the confidant of a love tale was too much, though I struggled hard, I did indeed, captain; and very sorry I shall be if I have hurt you."

"Oh d—dear, no!" stammered the unfortunate, whose cheeks and forehead and brain were tingling. "I daresay, ha, ha! I was making an ass of myself. All my fault; but I thought I was safe from"——

"You *are* safe, Captain Wilmot," interposed Marston, as the young man paused, "from any wrong use being made of what has been told in confidence to either Thornfield or myself. I have overheard a good deal of what has passed, and believe me, however much I may regret certain circumstances attendant upon the relation, I have felt no inclination to laugh."

"You are very good," murmured Frank, still a little indignant, though that sensation was nearly swallowed up by shame. "I shall take care in future."

"Will you?" The tone of the speaker was very kind, though grave. "I shall be glad to know it. And will you pardon one old enough to be your father if he points out the proper way to do so? Ah, Captain Wilmot, you are a young man, with nearly every worldly accessory in your favour——Hush!—I know more than you are aware. You have no cause for despair; but avoid that fatal weakness whose soothing influence is a delusion, and whose

certain end is death—a moral death to all those fair hopes you have now a right to cherish for your future."

"And shake hands, captain," said Thornfield, approaching with his own extended; "shake hands in token of forgiveness and of trust in my discretion. Whether or not I can sympathise, I can be silent. There—all's well."

And Frank, much to his astonishment, found himself (figuratively) "patted on the back," and accepting, from an acquaintance of that very morning, a lecture which he would scarcely have taken from his most intimate brother-officer.

"Good night!" said Marston, shaking his passive hand warmly.

"Good night!" echoed Thornfield, who had already taken a few paces forwards in the direction of the town.

"And once more, I repeat," were the last words of the former, as he slowly followed his companion, "do not give way to fears which may be idle,—do not heed appearances, however threatening. Be a man!"

"Basil," said the elder of the twain, as they went slowly down the hill together, "I like that young man, in spite of his palpable failings. They are those of youth and inexperience, not of an evil nature."

"I have seen a worse specimen myself," shortly replied the captain.

"He has launched his bark upon a troubled sea, poor lad," continued Marston; "but it must not be lost. I have an idea that I shall take it in tow, and bring it into port with my own."

"Ay," returned the other, after a short pause, and somewhat huskily—"hem—hem—you can do it easily enough when you will; and a better consort for you than the battered old gunboat that has sailed in your wake so long."

Marston turned, and looked intently on the bluff features of the speaker. "Basil," said he, slowly, "but that I know you do me justice in your heart, I should be more angry with you than I have been for many a day. Hear me, old friend. I like this youngster, as I say, and may have visions in my mind for his future, not wholly unconnected with my own. But you, comrade—give me your hand—you, to whom I owe a threefold debt for very existence; let us go together into that peaceful haven, which may, indeed, be not far distant, and, comrades to the grave, be fellow-soldiers also of God's army in the great HERE-AFTER!"

Basil Thornfield returned his friend's hearty grasp, but shook his head mournfully in answer to his appeal.

"You remember what that whelp—that prim-faced parson at Wiesbaden—called me,—'a hired assassin!' Is such a one a fitting companion to the grave for such as you? I who have lived as though in the belief that I was sent into the world to fight my way through it, sword in hand, and then—be resolved into the elements! No, Gilbert Marston—if I now know better things it is to you I owe the knowledge, and—hear me out—I would fain have to think ere my career closes, that I have done one benefit, unconnected with the shedding of blood, to my fellow-man; therefore"——



"Basil, will you listen to me?"

"Not now; therefore, I say, if I can see you restored to your true position—to happiness—to friends more fitting for your old age—I will rid you of my presence"——

"That shall you not"——

"And seek a fitting close to my own career in its appropriate field. *Basta!* I have said—I am not going to whimper—we are at the hotel—good night." Without another word, the man-at-arms vanished.

Marston in silence gazed after his retreating figure. "Will it indeed be so?"—thus ran his sorrowful reflections—"Have I persistently fanned the flame I might have quenched, in working out my own selfish ends? Fitting punishment, that the thought of what this man might have been, had I faithfully discharged my trust—I, his chosen mentor—should haunt me through the time to come."

When Frank Wilmot, on the other hand, reached his quarters, and sat down to collect his thoughts, the chief sensation he experienced was one of shame for the events of the evening; and while on his knees before retiring to rest, he solemnly vowed that he would tread his late debasing weakness for ever under foot. And though, next morning, looking back upon what had passed, he could not explain to himself upon what tangible grounds he experienced a feeling of hopefulness, he yet found that new-born sensation strong within his bosom, and resolved that he would patiently and trustfully await the development of its mysterious germ. In the meantime he sat down and

wrote home a full description of his new friends, just touching upon the remarkable expressions used by Colonel Marston, and entreating that inquiry might be made as to that individual's possible connexion with the county, and private history so far as it could be ascertained.

## CHAPTER VIII.

TOM CLINTON.

WE must now retrace our steps a short way—three or four chapters—to about that period when Lady Maudesley and her daughter were introduced to our notice. It is a dull, rainy morning, and, albeit the month is July, a small fire burns brightly in the grate of the neatly-furnished sitting-room wherein we take the post of observers. It is in London—in the vicinity of the clubs—say Sackville Street, Piccadilly, or thereabout—a bachelor's lodging, and the single tenant thereof sits with his back to the breakfast-table, and his feet on the fender. He had returned from the Continent but the day previously, and one of the few letters which had been awaiting his arrival lay open at his elbow. He had been perusing it, and was now pondering over its contents.

Let us describe this new member of our *dramatis personæ*.

He was not a remarkable-looking man; about the middle height, well and actively formed; not young, for his closely-cut hair was gray, and of a more advanced shade than were his small, well-trimmed moustaches. He

might, at a first glance, have been set down as a man of sixty, though a second view would prompt a modification of this opinion. But, as we know all about it, why make a mystery of his exact time of life? *he* never did. Colonel Thomas Clinton was fifty-four years old last birthday, which was——But do not let us, on the other hand, be tediously particular. His complexion was clear and healthy, though sun-browned, his features rather good than otherwise, and there was a gloomy fold about the lower part of his brow which seemed habitual, but was contradicted by the cheery light of his full gray eyes. His form was, on the present occasion, enveloped in a shawl dressing-gown, but what else could be seen of his costume was, though plain, *particular*; just what might have been expected in a single military gentleman of easy fortune and mature years. The above-mentioned 'gloomy fold was, at the present moment, somewhat deepened and contracted, which seemed attributable to the news contained in his letter.

"Poor Lucy!" he muttered. (This was Lady Maudeley's Christian name.) "Poor child!—how different if—hum—ah, well."

A glance at Thomas Clinton's earlier history may throw some light on these disjointed expressions.

Lucy Milward and Thomas Clinton were distantly related; had been playmates in youth, so far as the discrepancy in their ages permitted—there was a difference of some half-score years—and though, of course, no future arrangement of a matrimonial description could have been dreamed of at the time when, departing to join his regi-

ment in India, he bade farewell to the little damsel of seven, who wept thereat very bitterly, and laid aside her doll for half the ensuing afternoon,—yet, when, ten years subsequently, the young soldier (not looking so very young) revisited his native country, and of course renewed his acquaintance with his relatives, old and young, the case assumed a different aspect. By this time Clinton was an orphan, in easy circumstances, and Lucy's father, an old East Indian, had been left alone with the society of his child for the solace of his declining years—and a great and efficient solace it was. It is probable that the strict retirement in which Mr Milward lived alone prevented various attempts on the part of the young men, eligible and otherwise, of the vicinity to rob him of his treasure, for, though not rich, he had something to leave, and Lucy herself was one of the most winning creatures that ever adorned a hermitage. So, at least, thought Captain Thomas Clinton of her Majesty's ——th Regiment, returned on leave of absence from Bengal.

All things considered, it was not wonderful that, in the course of a very few months, the chief part of which was spent at Acacia Lodge, Clinton should have felt himself emboldened to attempt placing matters on a more tender footing between his fair cousin and himself, than that which had hitherto subsisted. There seemed likely to be little impediment to his suit, chiefly, it must be owned, because there was no one to contest the prize with him. Acacia Lodge was situated on the Devonshire coast, in the immediate vicinity of a small and unimportant country town,

whereof the amenities, as a watering-place, had not as yet been found out, thus affording that solitude which was grateful to the relaxed nervous system of the invalid Indian, and the chief drawback to which was the absence of educational facilities for his child. This, however, was to a great extent obviated by his having secured the services of a companion possessed of more than the average amount of accomplishment,—a lady of middle age, widow of an officer he had known slightly in India, now glad to eke out the resources of her scanty pension, and to obtain the comforts of a home, in requital for such tuition as she was able to impart. And with this, and an enforced two consecutive seasons in the metropolis, (the necessity whereof was urged by Mrs Beauchamp, and bitterly bewailed by Mr Milward,) Lucy had grown up with fully the usual amount of accomplishments, and much more than the average capability of putting them to use.

It is doubtful—more than doubtful—whether she ever cared much for her cousin, beyond what was cousinly and Platonic; but she made no objection when his suit became a declared and open one; and was at least content with the prospect of exchanging her present protector, when fate so willed it, for one whom she could so implicitly trust and—and—well—so perfectly understood as cousin Tom. As for Mr Milward, nothing could have happened to afford him more hearty satisfaction. His last trouble in this world seemed fairly lifted from his shoulders, and he said to himself, he could now descend to his grave in peace, an expression which not unfrequently implies or covers a tacit

inclination to enjoy the tranquillity of the path leading thereto, for as ample a period as Atropos may deem appropriate. Beware, O expectant legatees, of such expressions on the part of those whose translation to perfect bliss involves to you a medicine of that much adulterated and all-delusive article ycleped wordly good. They are suggestive of a repose of mind and facility of digestion which by no means bode well for your unhallowed aspirations. But to return—alas! there is sad truth (indeed, it is but a *truism*, though quaintly rendered) in the lamentation of our Scottish bard—

“The best laid schemes o’ mice and men  
Gang aft agley.”

And surely it was the malign influence of some mischievous star which brought about that which now happened. Whose star shall we say? Some vague, erratic constellation, surely, hostile to all, for at this moment we profess ourselves unable to decide which of the party was the greatest sufferer under its malign influence. Our readers can judge for themselves.

Thomas Clinton had been at home now for nearly a twelvemonth, and he was the recognised suitor of Lucy Milward. His leave of absence extended to about a like further period, but it was now arranged that on his marriage, which was to take place in a few months, he should exchange to a regiment on the home station, and thereafter, at his leisure, look about him for a situation on the staff, or endeavour to effect a second exchange to the household troops. Clinton had no lack of influential friends at head-

quarters, nor was he without claim on the score of hard service, therefore, little doubt was entertained of his success in either endeavour. There only remained a certain amount of indefiniteness about his plans, sufficient to afford ground for many a happy discussion during this, the brief sunshiny hour of poor Clinton's overcast day.

Matters were in this position, when another invalid, (a young one, this time,) an *attaché* to some embassy abroad, his health having suffered from the arduous duties, doubtless, of his profession, chose, by the special interposition of the evil influence aforesaid, the village of Splashton-supernare, for sea-bathing, and other requirements, according to prescription of his London physician, Dr Dawbody, who was at that time struggling into notice, not unsuccessfully, and who had, in the course of a summer tour on the southern and western coasts, been struck with the salubrious appliances of the little town, and had formed the idea of securing to himself the credit of establishing a new watering-place.

Mr Ralph Maudesley was the younger brother of a baronet well known for his eccentricity, but little known by person, as he was rarely seen in the great world of fashion, preferring to take his pleasure in that minor world, which furnishes food for the mind of a more varied, if less uniformly refined quality. There was no possible reason why Mr Maudesley should not be offered civility by the Milwards. In fact, it would have been ungracious and churlish not to do what in them lay to cheer the solitary hours of the invalid, who, sooth to say, at first in no shape seemed disposed to presume upon their kindness, or to



meet their overtures beyond the few steps which courtesy demanded. By degrees, however, as health returned to his frame, he began to shew more inclination to profit by the civility thus extended to him. By a process familiar as the alphabet to men of the above "great" world, he even contrived, in no great space of time, to get himself placed upon the footing of *ami de la maison*. He was never in the way, though always at hand when wanted; and if he did seem to relieve honest Thomas of his labours as *fiancé*, to a greater extent than was absolutely necessary, still, he contrived to bring out and make the most of the fair lady's accomplishments in a way which the former would never have dreamed of, and which was certainly the means of imparting pleasure to each one of the party, including Lucy herself of course.

Who would not have seen danger in this? who, but one so blindly indolent as the old Bengalee civilian; so utterly artless and unsophisticated as good Mrs Beauchamp; so honest and trusting as Thomas Clinton? Were not Lucy and he engaged? Who then could come between them? As we live, that man without guile never admitted a single qualm of doubt or misgiving within his brave, true heart. But the mischief had taken root, and was growing, and budding, and would shortly blossom and ripen, for all their blind faith.

Stalwart chivalry, armed cap-à-pie with shield and falchion, may cut his broad path unharmed through a host of skulking marauders; but blind honour, slumbering on a bench in the sun, will have his pocket picked as sure as he

lies there, and has anything about him to lose, until he becomes mere "barren honour" indeed, when his indorsement will cease to be a marketable commodity on the Vanity Fair Exchange.

But why linger over an episode so easily summarised, and which is but subsidiary to the main point of our narrative? Figuratively speaking, this gay young craft took the wind out of Clinton's sails in no time. That luckless individual was, according to his nature, slow to perceive the working of this poison drop in his cup of bliss—this snake in his blind paradise; but it came upon him at last, and culminated by swift degrees. In a very short space of time he passed through the regulated course of torture. Doubt, fear, the rapid decay of that hope which had been his life's absorbing interest, rent, each in turn, the very fibres of his inmost heart's core, till certainty crowned all, and—shall we say "broke" that heart? According to the conventional acceptance of the term, we should not go far beyond the truth in saying so. Hearts do not break, however, in the way sometimes attributed to them. Death there and then were the certain consequence of such a casualty, and people often live with broken hearts, so called, to a decent period of existence; but with a figurative bleeding chasm, which cicatrised after a time, but through which a healthy current of hopeful, buoyant life was never more to take its course, warming each vein to gladness, Thomas Clinton went on his way.

It was a conversation overheard—a few hurried words—a farewell—Ah! better far, had it been acted upon as

spoken, but the evil influence was at hand then as ever—which fairly enlightened the wretched Clinton as to the faithlessness of his betrothed. He did not even then blame her for the misery thus entailed upon him. How could he? She was ready to fulfil her engagement, and her whole conduct in the affair (at least so *he* thought) had been maidenly, if not altogether open. The truth is, she had struggled with her evil genius, and would have conquered him, perhaps, but for the very chivalrous simplicity of her betrothed himself.

But she could never, never again, be to him the Lucy Milward of his brief happy dream! That was over—she loved him not—she loved another—and Clinton had not the heart even to ask himself was that other worthy of her affection? Lucy had virtually proclaimed the fact, and she could do no wrong. So there was a scene—not a great one—an *eclaircissement*. Thomas Clinton, throwing up the remander of his furlough, returned to India alone. Ralph Maudesley and Lucy Milward were married, and went off to the embassy at Florence, leaving one veritable broken heart behind them—that of her father.

When the truth was broken to him, and the new scheme pressed upon him by his daughter's tears and her discarded lover's earnest intercession, he had said little; he seemed stunned by what to him was a terrible and unlooked-for blow, but he told them falteringly that "the furtherance of his child's happiness was the sole object which bound him to life." *That*, therefore, being secured in the manner chosen by herself, and he left alone—what remained for him

but to die? And die he did, most consistently, within a very few months of the new-married couple's departure. Ah! young people—from amid the joy, and the hope, and the brightness of your life's early summer, look back—look back lovingly, if but for one moment, ever and again, to the home of your infancy, which now rings with the voices of strange children, and to the silent slab of white marble in the corner of the old churchyard!

"And Cousin Tom," Lucy had said to her husband, clinging fondly to his arm, and looking joyously up into his eyes, bent down to meet hers, "he would evidently soon get over *his* disappointment—dear, simple Tom!"

Dear, simple Tom rejoined his regiment, as we have said, and, during the course of a dozen years or so of further service therein, was, according to the testimony of sundry admiring brother officers, never known to smile. Even now, what is it, as he sits in that bachelor lodging, that makes the fire-gleams in the little grate dance in ruddy stars before his honest gray eyes? The young men of the regiment at first not unfrequently "chaffed him" on the score of his gravity, intimating their opinion that he had been crossed in love somewhere, but those facetious suggestions were received with an unvarying stolid apathy, which soon put an end to their flow. And, believe us, gentle reader, there are gray-haired men now living who, from the depths of their own experience, can well understand why it is that Thomas Clinton, good man and true, whose heart the worthiest lady in the land might not have scorned as a gift, sits by that lonely hearth, with the Duke

of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel, framed and glazed, looking down upon him from the prim, cold walls.

Having now shortly explained the relations which may be supposed to exist between Colonel Thomas Clinton and the members of the Maudesley family, we once more take up the thread of our narrative.

The colonel glanced at the window, rose from his easy-chair, and proceeded to investigate the state of the weather. An improvement, decidedly — for the clouds shewed symptoms of breaking, and the ceaseless dull patter of rain drops had just given place to one of those violent down-pours, which not seldom heralds a favourable change. It was so in the present instance—a flickering gleam of sunlight passed, as it were, down the street—was followed by another and broader one—and finally by a tolerably long interval of unbroken radiance. The colonel retired to his dressing-room, and donned his walking habiliments, assumed hat and umbrella, and walked forth upon the well-washed pavement, whence little clouds of vapour ascended here and there, under the influence of the July sun.

“Wright and Thoroughpace,” muttered he, cogitating; “I may get something out of them to guide me in this; but they are cautious fellows—as indeed must I be for that matter.”

A duel of finesse, by the by, between Thomas Clinton and any average lawyer could hardly fail to be amusing; but in this instance the combat would lack interest for the community at large in the shape of danger to either party or to their clients.

Colonel Clinton was particular about his boots, and a "Hansom" was put in requisition for transit to the barbarous regions, wherein Mr Wright transacted business. That gentleman was within, as was also his junior partner, Mr Alfred Thoroughpace; but the latter, who was a smartly got-up personage of middle age and uneasy demeanour, after a few facetious references to the climate of Great Britain as compared with that of other countries, (he had been on the Continent this year,) left Mr Wright's sanctum, and, documents in hand, retired to his own. Clinton at once dashed *in medias res*.

"I have had a letter from Maudesley Hall, Mr Wright."

"Indeed!" Mr Wright, who had received his visitor cordially, as an old acquaintance, looked at him over the rims of his spectacles, without any particular expression in his tone or countenance.

"From Lady Maudesley—hem—she does not seem to be quite so well as we—as her friends could wish."

"I am sorry for *that*, colonel."

"And this does not seem attributable so much to any special ailment, as to anxiety about her—about Sir Ralph."

"Ay? I was not aware that he was complaining—he was here the day before yesterday, looking very much in his usual."

Tom Clinton saw that this tack would bring him no nearer port. Beating about was evidently useless—he would put steam on and run straight for the harbour mouth. So he got up from his chair and planted himself

on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire—a Briton's post of vantage.

"Mr Wright," said he, "I am going to ask you a few plain questions—of course you need only answer such—and those so far—as you are inclined."

Mr Wright's countenance received an accession of gravity, then he slightly smiled, and nodded acquiescence. Clinton went on.

"There is something about the position of matters in this family which is painful to their friends, and none the less so that it is inexplicable and mysterious."

"None the less, I should say, on that account." Mr Wright's tone was a little sarcastic; but he seemed to repent having made it so, as being from habit rather than from any feeling connected with the case in point; so he continued, in rather an encouraging tone, "Well, colonel" —

"You are aware what right I have to feel interested in this matter? Lady Maudesley is my relation, and a very early friend and playmate; and I am godfather—hem—hem—to her child."

"Bonny Geraldine"—(the Scottish accent was beginning to assert itself,)—"a sweet lassie! poor thing!—humph! ●y, ay."

"And she—Lady Maudesley, in plain terms, has asked for my assistance in unravelling this mystery; for a mystery it is to her as well as to the rest of us."

The lawyer once more almost imperceptibly smiled. "Would not Dr Dawbody be the best referee, after all?"

asked he, as Clinton paused, reflecting how he should go on.

"Dr Dawbody has signified his opinion that there is something here beyond his skill,—Lady Maudesley's letter tells me that. Now, Mr Wright, I am going to cross-examine you." Clinton here produced the document in question, and, again sitting down, unfolded and placed across his nose a double eye-glass—"Ahem!—um—yes—Thornfield. Pray, Mr Wright, do you happen to know a person of the name of Thornfield?"

"Thornfield! I have heard the name."

"That is not all. Are you aware of any connexion between a person of that name and Sir Ralph Maudesley's affairs?"

The lawyer was a little taken aback.

"Hooly and fairly, colonel," remonstrated he; "mind, I'm no on my oath."

"Your word will do quite as well. But I shall be much disappointed, and a little anxious, if you leave matters between us as they now stand, for I perceive you can answer my question, if you think fit."

"You're a witch, colonel—a wizard, that is; and I'll go so far as to say that I have seen the owner of the name you mention." ●

"Have you any positive objection to tell me what sort of man he may be?"

"N—no—I see not why I should—the man's an honest man, I believe."

"And that is an important item of the information I



want to arrive at. This Thornfield, then, can be in no shape connected with the distress which weighs upon Lady Maudesley's spirits?"

"I'm no prepared to say *that*, for a certainty. There may be matters between him and — we'll say any second party, which may be productive of annoyance to a third. But the question is"—the lawyer paused, and bite the top of his pen, reflectingly.

"Mr Wright, if you knew the anxiety with which I listen"—

"I can partly guess it, colonel; but all I was going to remark was, that it remains a question which party, if any, is to blame."

"To blame for what?"

"For the distress you mention—assuming that it exists—whereof, you will remember, I have not admitted any knowledge."

"Can you tell me where this Thornfield is to be found?"

"Lord bless you, colonel, that's a hard matter for any man to say; he belongs to your profession in a kind o' loose, scrambling way—here to-day, there to-morrow, wherever he can find work to do; and sad, wild work it is, at the best."

"Is he in the service of any foreign state?"

"He's been in the service of every foreign state in the known globe, I fancy; wha's livery he may be wearing now, I am unable to inform ye; but I would like to be as open with ye as I can, colonel," pursued the lawyer, noting, and compassionating the blank look of uncertainty

which began to overspread his companion's features. "I might possibly indicate his whereabouts; but it was communicated to me under trust, and—and—in fact, I would rather ye got the information from Sir Ralph."

"You think he can give it, and would?"

"I know he can; whether he *would* or no is a matter for you to ascertain, colonel."

Thomas Clinton ruminated. "It could do no harm," he soliloquised.

"None, I should say," pronounced the lawyer.

"Then, Mr Wright, I shall wish you a good morning, and proceed upon my mission. You have not told me much, but I am encouraged by what you *have* told me, in the hope that I may get these clouds cleared away. I shall seek this Thornfield."

"Colonel, one word, under strict seal of confidence—there's worse folk about Sir Ralph than Thornfield, and ower far in his confidence; he had to choose between him and another wha shall be nameless, and he chose the wrang man."

"And that other"——

"Shall be nameless; but you'll be at no loss to make him oot, before ye've been twa days at Maudesley Hall, if ye're going there, and ye cannot do better. Now, colonel, attend to me a minute; get *you* Sir Ralph's confidence."

"Ay, there's the difficulty."

"No so much as you would think. A poor weak creature—hem—hem. A' this is in strict confidence;

but I'm safe wi' *you*. Weel, that matter managed, I'm firmly of opinion that the affair would then be at a point where one man's agency might settle a' for good."

"And that man"——

"Is Basil Thornfield; an' I'll put ye in the way to find him." And the lawyer buttoned up his breeches-pockets as though he kept his secrets there, and had allowed egress to as much as he thought fit for the present.

"Good-bye, Mr Wright, and many thanks. You have reposed a certain amount of trust in my honour, and you shall not find it misplaced."

"I should rejoice were it in my power, colonel, to make it more; but, mere man of business as I am, you'll have no more cordial well-wisher to the success of your mission. Fare-ye-well!"

The lawyer pulled the feathers of a quill to pieces before resettling to his desk, during which operation Thomas Clinton regained his vehicle, and drove off to his club, the "Tatter and Tinsel." Here his first proceeding was to examine the *Railway Guide*. Next day's afternoon express would be just the thing; nothing to suit before that. And in the meantime he could write to announce his advent; a necessary step, for it was long since he had been an inmate of the hall; and, though five or six years ago he had received a sufficiently cordial general invitation there, he had rarely taken advantage of it; indeed he had been little in England; and his present impromptu visit would undoubtedly be a surprise to Sir Ralph. So

he wrote, and, having deposited his short epistle in the letter-box, descended once more to the dining-room, where he ordered his usual modest luncheon—a biscuit and a glass of sherry.

We defy any one who has followed for a half-dozen of years the profession of arms to remain as many minutes under the roof of the "Tatter and Tinsel" without tumbling against some acquaintance of his own calling; it may be some intimate friend of other days suddenly called home on "urgent private affairs;" it may be some one of only half-recognised features, to whom it puzzles you, without mature consideration, to give a name. Clinton had not been long seated at his solitary table before a much-moustached individual, first favouring him with a brief scrutiny through his eye-glass, bore down upon him with outstretched hand and joyous visage.

"Tom Clinton of the old ——th! who the doose expected to see *you* here?"

The latter, looking up, at once recognised the features of an old comrade, though when they had last met the moustache had been wanting to the lip, and certain tiny 'crows' feet' to the corners of the eyes. But there was no mistake about his identity; it was Jack Lutrell—late captain in the ——th Foot, Tom's regiment—who had, some years before Clinton left the service, exchanged into one of her Majesty's regiments of the household cavalry. He now sat astride the seat of a chair by his late commanding-officer's side, with his arms folded on the back, and his chin resting on the head of a thick knotted walking-stick. His

whole style and demeanour were decidedly those of the Five's Court, but his smile was full of good nature, and he stood revealed "a gentleman" somehow, in spite of all he could do and did to disguise the fact.

"What's up, old fellow? What are you doing with yourself?" asked he, in a sort of cordial drawl, (we cannot better describe the guardsman's tone.) "Something good on the staff?"

"My dear Jack, you are oblivious. I have been a gentleman at large for the last five years. Sold out."

"So you did. I forgot. Thought you had gone on half pay. Well, and how do you kill the enemy? Come, the *dolce far niente* agrees with you, old chap; never saw you looking better. But where the doose have you been hiding? You're not—not"—here the guardsman hesitated, and looked alarmed, as one who asks a friend doubtfully after the health of some sickly relative after long absence—"not *spliced*, are you?"

"No such horror," said Thomas Clinton.

"Ah, I thought not," quoth Lutrell, breathing freely. "But one never can tell, such strange things happen. There was Phil Buxton the other day—the best fellow—poor deyvil! Well, so you've cut the concern for good—eh?"

"Ay, ay, Jack. I was getting out of date, and, do as we will, the rising lot will 'push us from our stools.' The way of the world, old fellow!"

"Ya—as," drawled the life-guardsman, who had never heard the quotation, and thought it an odd expression. "But do you ever hear from the old corps? I've lots of

fellows to ask after. There's So-and-so, and So-and-so, and So-and-so," (naming various old brother-warriors of the gallant —th.)

"So-and-so," quoth Clinton, repeating the names one by one, "is married, and, of course, you know, done for; So-and-so cut the service, and went to farm in New Zealand; So-and-so died two years ago, I believe, of *delirium tremens*."

"Zounds! that last is the stereotyped answer to one half the inquiries I make after my old friends."

"Too truly so, I fear, Jack," said Clinton. "It is one of the few points on which I allow that the present-day lot has the advantage over the old."

"Ah, brandy pawnee never was a pet institution of yours, Tom," said Lutrell, beating a kind of tattoo with the head of his cane against his strong white teeth.

"Nor of yours either, old fellow; thanks to which I now see you sitting before me, and looking very much as you did seven years ago—what change there is being for the better!"

Jack Lutrell complacently smoothed his long moustache. "Yaas; I'm pretty fresh," said he. "Not that I object to a glass of bingo in its proper place, either."

"Well, will you dine here, say at seven?"

"Can't. I'm really very sorry; but I'm going to have a chop at the "Dromedary" in St Martin's Lane.

"The where?"

"'Dromedary.' Flash crib—this sort of thing," quoth

the life-guardsmen, squaring with doubled fist over the back of his chair. "Won't you come? First-rate sparring expected to-night. Tom Squares himself, Nigger Dick, the Battersea Bloak"—

"No, I thank you, Jack; at my time of life one is proof against even such an array of talent as that."

"But one sees queer characters at such cribs," urged Jack Lutrell; "chaps worth studying. Old Bill Gaunt himself is a study. By the by," continued he, speaking low in Clinton's ear, "Brelacq is in town,—has been seen at Gaunt's."

"Bre—who?"

"Brelacq. Must have heard of him. Cleverest fellow in France, sir, or England either, now he's on this side the Channel. He's a detective,—a thieftaker."

"Oh!" said Clinton, who now remembered having heard the name, which was indeed a noted one.

"Yaas; he was twigged at Gaunt's, by 'a cove as does business occasionally across the vater,'" said the guardsman, mimicking the phraseology of the class referred to. "I take it he wasn't best pleased to see Brelacq, for he sloped like winkin'."

"A natural antipathy."

"With a little special reason, perhaps, to back it. Brelacq had come to look after some of his stray lambs, there's no doubt of that, and thought Bill's no unlikely place to find him; which no more it ain't, for that matter."

"Some poor devil, perhaps," said Tom Clinton, pityingly, "more sinned against than sinning."

"Some unchanged scoundrel, probably, that ought to be quartered," said Jack Lutrell, wishing to place the matter, at all events, where it could be viewed in both lights. "But you won't come; so be it. I must be off to the racket court. Ta, ta, old fellow. I'll tell you what," continued he, returning, as a bright idea struck him, "if you don't like coming to Bill's, where do you hang out? If you like to order a grilled bone, or 'summat' of that sort, at about twelve, hang it, suppose I bring Tom Squares and introduce you—if you don't mind his smoking pig-tail."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Jack. By twelve I trust I shall be in the arms of Morpheus. And in any case, I really could not undertake to entertain Mr Squares."

"As you like, old fellow. It's not every one could bring Tom, I can tell you. However, bye, bye, once more. See you again soon, I hope," and the sporting man took himself off to the playing of his own proper rôle.

Clinton passed the remainder of the afternoon in making sundry preparations for his trip to —shire; and on the next day followed out his plan by taking a seat in the express train for Haverton, with a kind of feeling of having braced his nerves for a difficult, if not unpleasant task. But he was prepared to go at it in much the same style as that in which he had more than once led a party to charge a battery of field guns.



## CHAPTER IX.

### MONKSHOOD VALE.

ON the same day with the events of which we have just been occupied, Geoffry St Alban, Esq., newly returned from his last visit to Maudesley Hall, (they were not like angels' visits, probably in any sense whatever,) sat under the shadow of his own roof, alone. Thus occupied, his *ménage* offers a pretty fair contrast to the bachelor establishment we have just described. Mr St Alban also sits gazing moodily into the fireplace, but no flame sparkles therein, and the grate is empty, save from the one or two stumps of cigars which lie about, there being also a very decided flavour of tobacco of ancient date about the walls and furniture of the apartment. This is Mr St Alban's private room—his sanctum, within the penetralia of which few prying eyes make their way; and it is furnished after a manner which may be comfortable to the occupant, for *tous les goûts sont respectables*, but which is neither convenient nor appropriate. There had been an attempt apparently, some time ago, to give an elegant appearance to this apartment, but, owing to the treatment which the various articles of use and embellishment had received, this

only made matters worse, and some had vanished altogether, while others which remained would have done well to have followed their example. And Mr St Alban sits in a frayed and soiled morocco-leather American rocking-chair, with his feet on the fender, and his eyes fixed on the empty grate. His brows are knit in contemplative fashion, and the bland expression which beamed beneath them erstwhile, is gone for the present, leaving one which is ungenial, if not actually sinister. He is not positively in a bad humour, nor is he by any means exultant; something is not progressing exactly as he could wish—there is a stumbling-block in the way, but a little finesse may remove it, and finesse has been the breath of his nostrils for many years past; so he is gravely meditative, but not depressed.

Mr St Alban had sat for some time nearly immovable in the above position, when he seemingly came to a conclusion upon some point of mental discussion. He held his breath for a moment; glanced, as it were, involuntarily, in a furtive manner round; then, giving the pent-in feeling, whatever it was, vent in a deep suspiration, he stood up briskly and rubbed his hands. It was worthy of note that the above furtive glance had seemed to arrest its course, and become fixed on a certain corner of the room. A mere accident evidently; there is nothing there but a simple oblong mahogany case, about a foot and a half long, on a plain deal table with an oil-cloth cover.

Mr St Alban rang the bell. A tolerably respectable-looking servant in livery answered the summons, after some

delay, during which Mr St Alban's gaze had scarcely ever wandered from that table. The dregs of his late brown study were evidently still upon him, and his mental gaze was, no doubt, on vacancy.

"Has that man come—he who left word he would call again?"

"The foreign man, sir?"

"Foreign fiddlestick!—the man from Haverton about the—a—Irish setters."

There had been but one man inquiring for Mr St Alban during his absence, the domestic remembered, though he had heard nothing about the "setter" part of the question.

"No, sir; but the man that called while you were in London, said he would call again on Wednesday, that's to-day, sir."

"Very well, shew him up when he comes—and—if he brings the dogs, let one of the grooms tie them up in the stable till I am at leisure to look at them."

"Very good, sir."

Mr St Alban, once more alone, walked musingly up and down the apartment, and his meditations took a form which by degrees became half audible. Muttering to himself as he walked, he did not look by any means so amiable as the Mr St Alban of daily life, though he smiled not seldom—but it was the flash of lightning across the thundercloud.

"Hum—um—m—m—it must come to that; how the devil could I ever expect to cut the knot otherwise—like a

blind fool—but there was always the chance of some one taking the trouble and the risk off my hands.”

At this point Mr St Alban paused, and surveyed the member in question—the right one. One of the above lurid smiles stole over his features as he looked ; then he went through sundry conventional forms of politeness in a sort of mocking way, addressing himself to vacancy : “How do you do,” muttered he ; “my dear sir—my dear madam—I hope you are very well—good-bye—bless you—*au revoir !—ma foi !* what squeamish, delicate fingers have lain in that palm without a shiver—the Reverend Otho—and the priest—but *he*—I have sometimes thought whether it would not suit my plans to make a confidant of *him !* seal of holy confession—but no, my course is a solitary one, till all be made safe, and the goal won, then—ah ! then—I wonder”—— here his musings became inaudible, but, each time he turned in its direction, his eyes without fail sought the mahogany case. A loud peal at the hall-door bell interrupted his meditations. Mr St Alban started, and a light shade of pallor might have been observed to steal over his features.

“Boulnois, evidently,” muttered he, “and he sounds that noisy alarum by way of proclaiming the temper in which he comes. Be it so—forewarned, forearmed, monsieur.”

The individual he apostrophised was now apparently surmounting the staircase which led to Mr St Alban’s retreat, for a voice was heard loudly conversing in what sounded like broken English, with the servant who ushered him.

"Ah, very well," again soliloquised Mr St Alban, with one of his most expressive smiles, "good once more; let the whole establishment know all about you, or give them food at least for wonder and conjecture—ass! beast! no matter—but you had better have remained abroad, believe me, Monsieur Jacques Boulnois."

Here the personage in question was ushered into the apartment, and the servant, after placing an almanac and a sporting review at slightly different angles with the edge of the table, and elaborately smoothing the cloth, retired, foiled in his object of observing the nature of the stranger's reception, for Mr St Alban, after one glance over his shoulder, reverted carelessly to his occupation of winding up the small French clock on the mantelpiece, and the newcomer, hat in hand, silently awaited his leisure. The moment, however, the door was fairly closed, (it was a double door lined with green baize,) and the sound of retreating footsteps died away in the distance, Mr St Alban turned round, and sternly, but at the same time with an uneasy expression in his eye and quivering nostril, surveyed the stranger. The servant had been pretty well warranted by appearances in pronouncing the man to be a foreigner. His complexion was swarthy, and his small dark eyes were nearly hid under the penthouse of a heavy brow, in the centre whereof, just above the nose, which was flat and rather broad, met a pair of grizzled eyebrows. He wore neither beard nor moustache, though there was a well-defined blue mark shewing the natural limits of both on lip and chin; neither had he any whisker, and his

coarse black hair, which was unshorn and little kempt, was gathered away behind his large ears, these last being adorned with rings. This gave him somewhat the look of a seafaring man, but his dress did not carry out that impression. A long black paletot, considerably worn, buttoned up to meet a greasy black stock which was fastened in front with a couple of common pins; trousers of black and white check, the natural black being nearly merged in that which was adventitious; ankle boots; and a wide-awake of foreign appearance, which he held in one coarse ungloved hand—these completed his attire. In person he was broad-shouldered and active-looking; altogether, he was the sort of person who might have a brace of sporting dogs to dispose of, no matter how obtained, or a variety of other articles, sporting or contraband. He now awaited the opening of the conference with an expression on his face which was not one of deference, nor yet of perfect ease. The conversation which ensued set at rest the question of the stranger's nationality; it was conducted in French, though we shall, for convenience sake, translate it into the vulgar tongue.

“So—behold you once more.”

“To be sure—*vive la bagatelle!* Why not?”

“Will it be a *bagatelle* if it conducts you back to *La Force?*”

“*Mon ami!* you are nearer the truth by accident than would quite please you, if you knew. Look here; I come to you sooner than you expected.”

“According to our terms, you had no right to come at all.”

"Our terms were void as soon as I discovered that you were playing me false. You gave me a modest estimate of your funds, *mon brave!*"

"Who told you that?"

"One who knows the real state of the case well. But no matter; I am about to explain my presence here to-day. *Ecoutez!*" and the man came close up to St Alban, who still leaned against the chimney-piece, and whispered a few words, scarcely three; he had no time for more. St Alban, as pale as death, started back, and glared upon the speaker with a fixed eye and quivering lip.

"*Vrai!*" said the man, nodding. "I saw him; he did not see me; at least, I think not; but he will not be long without that pleasure, unless he is much changed, or I can put the broad sea between us."

"Where?" This was all Mr St Alban could articulate, and it was in a sort of choking gasp.

"Yonder," said the man, indicating the metropolis, by jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "London; a house of fighting men—*le boxe*—where I sometimes find myself."

"How do you know whom he seeks?"

"I do not know *that*; but I know very well whom he would be glad to find; two old friends."

"It is impossible that *I* should be in his thoughts."

"*Mon ami*, I will be candid with you. It is my impression that he is in search of none other than one Jacques Boulnois, but—Jacques is sociable, and if he goes to the *Place de Grève, ma foi!* he will not go alone, unless"—

"Go on."

"Unless fair means shall have been kindly placed at his disposal beforehand for securing his escape. Look here, Monsieur—hum—Monsieur Smeet,"—(here the speaker laughed, as appreciating a stroke of humour,)—*c'est ça*,—what I received was, after all, no great sum; but I had a plan; that plan has failed; *bien*, I have another, but to carry it out I must have money."

"When did you return from Germany?"

"About—bah! for what am I to deceive you? I have not been there."

"Where, then?"

"In the metropolis of the universe," said the man, swaggering off a slight embarrassment, "Paris."

"You tell me you have been to Paris?"

"I have been there, and of course I tell you."

"Good." Mr St Alban, whose complexion had retained its deathlike hue ever since the whisper above mentioned, spoke from between his clenched teeth. "Behold explained *his* visit to London!"

"*Ma foi!*" said the other, laughing once more, "he is *bien poli*—he returns my call."

"And will take you with him, *en retour*, to his chateau."

"Not if you will listen to reason. But, *mon ami!* does it not strike you that we waste time, and that time is precious? Will you listen, once for all, to what I have to say?"

"Say on."



"I will. Time is precious, Monsieur Smeet. It is more; it is life. He, then, I tell you, is looking for me. If, unaided, I fall into his clutches, I will not go alone. Give me the means of safety for us both—money."

"How much is it you require?"

"I set you free from all risk for—twenty-five thousand francs."

The man looked as if he expected and was prepared for an explosion, but none followed. St Alban gazed at him with an eye whose glance seemed to travel somehow far beyond the rugged features on which it rested. Their owner began to get uneasy under that blank gaze, and the pause which ensued.

"Speak to me, *mon ami*; I do not like that look; I have seen it before."

"Listen! Your plans are little likely to lead to good. I will form one for you."

"Humph;" the man scratched his square jaw with a sort of uneasy irony, but awaited in silence what more was to come.

"I have no money,"—(Monsieur Boulnois grinned a grin which possessed a certain family resemblance to Mr St Alban's own late mirthfulness,)—"but I can put you in the way to possess yourself of three times the sum you name."

"And the risk?"

"Will be small, provided my directions be followed *au pied de la lettre*! You have done business before in the way I am about to mention, Monsieur Boulnois."

"Ah, ça ; I perceive. But for a business of the sort you hint at I must get my friends to assist ; and I do not see how I am to manage that at present."

"You will not need them ; you will be better without them."

"So, so. Proceed, Monsieur Smeet."

"Do you see that large building among the woods—here from this window ?"

"*Avec les tourettes gris?—certainement.*"

"I happen to be on intimate terms with the owner of that mansion. I left it but yesterday ; I return there to-morrow." (Monsieur Boulnois was getting much interested.) "The said owner is a man of wealth, which exists not in France, save among a few of the *haute noblesse*, or the richest merchants. That wealth is collected at stated times—is being collected now."

"*Sacré mille tonnerres!*" The man's eyes sparkled beneath his shaggy eyebrows, and his form seemed to dilate, while his muscular brown hand worked spasmodically.

"I saw a portion of it large enough to furnish thrice over the sum you require, and leave a residue."

"Bah ! with your residue ! I have but named the minimum—the maximum is in the clouds."

"I saw that money, I say, chiefly in gold, which tells no tales, consigned to a certain cabinet in a certain apartment. Three days hence it will be gone."

"Gone ! Then why tell me this ?"

"Three days hence, I tell you. Are you become a fool ?"

The man was now seated, leaning forward with his small dark eyes fixed intently on St Alban's face.

"*Sacré carambole !*" he said. "Tell me at once plainly what you would have me to do."

"We are alone ; no need for caution here. Make yourself master of that gold ! With my aid,—remember I shall be an inmate of the house,—the task is neither difficult nor dangerous."

The temptation was doing its work. "Three times twenty-five," muttered the man to himself, "and a residue. Bah ! tell me in three words how much you saw, Monsieur—humph—Smeet." Monsieur Boulnois's countenance wore a savage look of eagerness, like that of a tiger which smells blood.

"In gold—I only recommend your meddling with *that*—about seventy—five—thousand—francs—in English livres."

Monsieur Boulnois drew a deep breath. "There is safety in the possession of that sum, *mon ami*, provided there be safety in getting at it. And how much would fall to the share of my friend Smeet, when all was accomplished ?"

"None!—stay—I am sadly bare of funds too—but I leave that point to your discretion. Only rid me of your presence, and swear never to cross my path again !"

"I might do that, if you are playing me fair ; and I do not think you dare do otherwise, considering who awaits tidings of us both yonder. Let me reflect—to-morrow, say you ? Time is valuable, *mon brave !*"

"To-morrow I shall go there. What I suggest cannot take place till I have formed my plans upon what I shall

see. You must contrive to meet me somewhere, the day after to-morrow, for final instructions."

"I tremble for your three days, comrade! But name your place and hour; in this matter you necessarily assume command."

"At dusk, say eight o'clock, or thereabout. Ask for the west lodge of Maudesley Park, or find it for yourself, if you are wise—there need be no difficulty. Where do you put up?"

"In a '*petit cabaret*' in Haverton, near the great canal—the Dog and Duck. I am an artist of daguerreotype, you conceive, Monsieur Smeet; and I have specimens which I shew, but my instruments shall not arrive from London for a few days," said Monsieur Boulnois, laughing. "Oh, it is a very nice house, and very retired in situation, the Dog and Duck."

"Are you not rash to go about thus without any disguise?"

"Bah! I have worn so many that I begin to be least known in my own proper shape. *He* is the only person whose recognition might be feared, and he will hardly follow me here yet. If he once suspected, all the disguise in Europe would not blind him."

"If he hears your description, however—but *n'importe*, I trust to hear of you at Brussels, or Baden."

"Or America," suggested the man, rubbing his hands excitedly.

"Ah! better still, and best of all; for once upon the broad ocean, you may snap your fingers at *him*."

"No fear as to a welcome either, with sixty or seventy thousand francs in my purse."

"Nor any dearth of congenial spirits among whom to spend it. You undertake the affair, then?"

"*Vraiment, oui*; if the final arrangements you talk of seem to me what they ought to be."

"Good! you will now return to the Dog and Duck, and let me recommend you to be abroad as little as possible in the interim. You are not a prepossessing figure, Monsieur Boulnois."

The latter seemed about to make a facetious retort, but he changed his mind, and coming close up to Mr St Alban, who still stood by the fireplace, he said in low tones, "Remember, *mon ami*, be this plan of yours successful or not, I *must* have the money I spoke of—all the more and the sooner if your plan fails—and if you play me false"—A most significant gesture closed this sentence, and Monsieur Boulnois, backing towards the door, with his eyes fixed sternly on those of his host, finally left the room and the house.

Mr St Alban resumed his walk up and down, and his contemplation of the little mahogany case. Suddenly, as he paced back and forward, a thought struck him; he rang the bell.

"William," said he fretfully, when the domestic already mentioned made his appearance, (he had shewn Monsieur Boulnois out, and was staring after him with all his might,) "William, that fellow is a humbug—has no dogs, nor ever had any, I believe, and—and—I don't half like his looks. If he comes about here again, keep an eye on him!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE GOOD GENIUS ARRIVES.

ON the morning following, Sir Ralph Maudesley entered the drawing-room of the hall with an open letter in his hand, and a look of some surprise on his features. Lady Maudesley, who was seated there alone, glanced nervously at him, but it was impossible to say whether he was pleased or the reverse; he looked puzzled. We may here remark, *en parenthèse*, that her ladyship had received a short epistle in the same handwriting as that displayed by her lord and master.

“My dear, to see you down at this early hour is a joyful surprise,—I believe I can repay you in kind. Who, of all persons in the world, think you, has written to announce a visit—this very day too?”

“Colonel Clinton was expected in London, I heard,” murmured Lady Maudesley, very busy with a piece of embroidery.

“And Colonel Clinton—honest Tom—it is. Well, I am sure we shall be glad to see your cousin, but I wish we had some one to meet him. These impromptu visits are not always convenient, that is the honest fact.”

"Tom will not ask for any society but our own, and I will take care you shall not be troubled."

"Troubled, my dear—there is no question of *trouble*."

"I mean, I and Geraldine will gladly charge ourselves with her godfather's entertainment; and Mr Docksay dines here to-day. Tom and he were good friends long ago, and, I know, will like to meet. We shall get on very well, I am sure."

Some one else was expected too, but Sir Ralph did not think it necessary to say anything about him. Indeed, *he* came and went without any comment, from day to day.

"And how do you feel this morning, Lucy?" asked he, taking her hand in his, and looking tenderly enough on her pale countenance. "Are you really equal to this exertion? You will not find the excitement of your cousin's arrival too much for you?"

"On the contrary, I know no one whose coming could afford me such pleasure. I have not seen Tom for years, and as he never pays long visits, we shall have more than enough to talk about during his probable stay of a few days."

"So be it. I shall be glad too to see him—sincerely glad. I wish with all my heart he had come about us more."

Lady Maudesley looked up from her embroidery frame, somewhat struck with the tone in which Sir Ralph spoke the last two or three words. His brows were knit, and his eyes fixed on vacancy in a manner to which her ladyship was well accustomed of late years.

"I wish he had been here once, years ago."

"When, my dear?"

Sir Ralph sighed deeply. "At a time when I had business in which a friend's assistance was much wanted—no matter now. Geraldine is late this morning, surely."

"We are rather early—it is just nine. But if there be anything in which Tom Clinton can be of use, you will not hesitate to ask him?"

"Neither he nor any other human being can be of use in the matter I speak of—that is all past and gone. There is the breakfast-bell, and here is Miss Maudesley. A present for you, darling, to give you an appetite," and he handed her the open letter, "but breakfast, breakfast—after you, Miss Geraldine—you can study what you have there as we sit at table."

As they proceeded to the breakfast-room, Geraldine and her mother exchanged a significant pressure, after which the younger lady broke into open expressions of delight at the promised visit. She had not seen her godfather since she was a mere child, but his name was a household word there, and she now gaily discussed the various modes in which his stay might be made pleasant to him.

Was there no one they could get to meet him? Sir James Bellingham was still in London; Mr Prescott of Warleigh Grange had gone to the north; the Grenvilles, the Wingroves—all gone, or shaking their wings for a flight somewhere. The Wilmots—*they* were at home, and would gladly come, but neither Geraldine nor her mother dared breathe the name, nor would poor Geraldine



wish to meet them just at present, though she cherished a presentiment that their intimacy might be revived under more favourable circumstances at some future period.

We must here beg that it may be understood we do not mean to convey an impression that Geraldine Maudesley was in love with Francis Wilmot—nothing of the sort—nor had that young man ever made those distinct advances which would have justified her giving way to any such feeling. She liked him certainly as well—perhaps better than any young man she had met, and, with fair opportunities of meeting, nothing could be more natural and probable than that the young people should become attached to each other; and it was this palpable likelihood which caused Sir Ralph Maudesley to hold aloof from the young man and the members of his family. For, by the pursuing fate which dogged his footsteps, he had been schooled to shrink with dread from any appearance of opposition which might expose him to its wrath. Would he go to the extremity of propitiating that evil genius by offering up the victim it demanded? Could aught be gained or aught averted sufficient to justify to himself this monstrous sacrifice?

This was a question which formed the burden of his hourly meditation—was the thorn beneath his pillow—the skeleton in his cupboard—and he could not solve it. So he temporised, trusting that the dark hour would pass away *somehow*, though well-nigh hopeless of comfort from the light.

In the meantime, Colonel Clinton having, as before

stated, got over his small preparations for a visit of a few days,—with his style of tactics he must either win or lose in that time,—entered a first-class railway carriage, and rattled off at thirty miles an hour for Haverton.

The romance of the road is gone—gone with four-horse teams and posting stages; but who would in very fact revert to those days, upon which the memory of some amongst us still love to dwell? The fresh breeze on the moor, the scent of brier and woodbine as we whirl past beneath the horse-chestnuts, the brisk bugle-sounds in the quaint village street—ay, but the dust, the delay, the heat, the cold, and the blinding storm, lump all together, and say, are we not better off in these prosaic times? We are arguing *sans* opponent, we take it, so let the question rest.

Thomas Clinton neared his destination, and, as he did, so, began to feel a little nervous. He had few associations of any sort with Maudesley Hall itself—no pleasant ones. The first and only time he had ever been there was some five years ago, when he had witnessed scarcely that amount of bliss which, to his ideas, ought to have existed where Lucy was the presiding genius. Why had she not fully confided in him then? He had never liked Ralph Maudesley much, but the latter had always shewn much respect for his opinion, and he might have had it in his power to obviate the discomfort of all those subsequent years.

True, Thomas, true—but it was ordered otherwise. Put your strong shoulder to the wheel *now*, and strive with all

the energy of your honest nature to regain for your friends the broad highway.

"Haverton—Haverton for Maudesley." Down got the colonel, and his portmanteau was taken from the luggage-van and deposited on the platform.

"Colonel Clinton?" inquired a smart groom, who had descended from a handsome dog-cart, leaving it under the temporary care of a lounge.

"Yes. The family all well at the hall?"

"All quite well, sir. *Your* luggage, sir? portmanteau, hatbox."

"That is all. Any strangers just now at the hall?"

"No, sir—leastways, Mr St Alban is expected, but he's hardly to say a stranger, sir."

"Oh," said Tom Clinton, who fancied he detected a *souppçon* of irreverence in the domestic's tone, and his thoughts reverted to his conversation with Mr Wright. The man, as soon as Clinton was fairly settled, drove off, and about twenty minutes brought them to one of the lodge gates of the park. The remainder of the way lay for upwards of a mile through a wilderness studded with magnificent old trees. How deeply beautiful was the shade, and how vividly the sunlight glanced through the spreading branches and fretted the mossy turf!

"And she cannot be happy with all this!" sighed Clinton to himself, as he gazed after a tripping herd of fawns, which crossed the avenue and vanished among the underwood. "Something must be wrong, very wrong," and he felt weak for a moment, and doubtful of his power

to cope with an evil which must be so deep-rooted, but he would do his best.

"Her ladyship is in the drawing-room, colonel," said the butler, who recognised the arrival, and received him on the steps with much *empressement*—"this way."

Her ladyship—Lucy—was within a few feet of him. Tom Clinton's heart beat with rapid strokes; he would have liked a minute or two to sit down and collect himself, but none was allowed him.

"Colonel Clinton." He heard himself announced, a murmured reply, a rustle of silken drapery, and the words,—in accents, oh! so well known,—“Tom, Cousin Tom, I am so glad, so much obliged,” and his hand was clasped by that of Lucy Milward.

Of Lucy Milward—for to the days when she had borne that name, and no other, his memory flew back, as he felt the pressure of that hand. He had seen her since, but it was only for a brief space, during which his brain had somehow never settled to the new state of things; and as he gazed upon these pale features, the Lucy of his heart's first and last devotion shone out from beneath the mask of time and sorrow.

He now sat on the sofa beside her, and answered to her calm, gentle questioning, he knew not what. She might have been talking in any language under the sun, and his replies would have been much the same; but his mind was one too well balanced to be long in recovering its equipoise, and Thomas Clinton gradually became himself again. He had leisure now to observe the melancholy

change which had taken place in Lady Mandesley's lineaments within the last few years. But he spoke gaily.

"You have summoned me—here I am," said he; "I am the slave, not of the lamp, but of the taper whereat you seal your epistles; and you have but to indicate the task to which the *génie* is to address himself."

"I have so much to tell by way of prologue, that I scarcely know how to begin; and, surely, the very moment of your arrival is scarcely"—

"No time like the present; and cut out the prologue altogether. Time is short—is valuable, that is; for the time I have to give is simply that which your business demands. I am an idle man; and so, being here alone together, suppose you give me a sketch of the state of affairs?"

"Well, then—but you have not seen Ralph? You will find him sadly altered."

"What is the matter with him?"

"My dear cousin, you take the words out of my mouth. What is indeed the matter with him? What can be the matter with a husband which a wife must not know? I ask you the question—men know each other's ways—understand each other's interests. I have long since relinquished the study in despair."

"Ah, come; I do not like that word 'despair.' Listen to me. To unravel this mystery, I must get the end of the clue somehow. Wade backward, if necessary, towards the fountain-head."

"If you find it practicable; but the study will be a

difficult one, for he will not shew himself to you as he has done to me."

"True; but you will tell me all you have seen, without reserve. Half confidences, Lucy, I need not say, are little better than none."

"Indeed, I will hide nothing from you, Tom. I have had a hard struggle with my sense of duty to him; but I have come to a decision now, and I will act faithfully up to it. The immediate cause of our distress is on Geraldine's account, poor child!"

"Ah! tell me about that."

"You know how intimate we were with a family of the name of Wilmot?"

"Of Wilmot's-Tower? Certainly. I remember being much prepossessed in favour of them—a fine lad the son—entered the service about the time I was here, and is since a captain. What of them?"

"Frank Wilmot and poor Geraldine were early playmates; and I had hoped, for there was everything in favour of the scheme, that by and by they might have become attached to each other."

"Well, and what hitch has occurred? Won't it do? As fine a youngster as I remember to have seen."

"Everything was going on as smoothly as possible, and Geraldine, I think, did like him much, as we all did—who would not? Francis Wilmot had everything in his favour that could be imagined; but"—

"Hum—a little caprice on the part of my goddaughter, I fear."

"Not in the least. I believe I may say Geraldine is above caprice; but quite suddenly, without any visible cause, Ralph, who had never been very cheerful since his brother's death—you know it nearly killed him at the time—fell into a state of the most miserable dejection."

"The sight of which is wearing you out, day by day—poor child!"

The tears filled Lady Maudesley's eyes as she listened to these accents so tenderly compassionate, and a vivid flush rose to her cheek and brow. After all, she had never been quite able to banish a vague uneasy feeling that Cousin Tom had not been well used; she had stifled it for long, but it had come back of late years. However, she recovered herself, and proceeded.

"Then came the worst stroke of all. There is a man—a gentleman who has a small estate in the neighbourhood,—his name is St Alban; and I may here mention that you will meet him this evening"—

"Ay, ay."

"Who had contrived to place himself, no one knows exactly how, on a footing of intimacy with Ralph some years ago. This Mr St Alban, to our astonishment and dismay—Geraldine's and mine at least, I know not what to think of Ralph's sentiments on the subject—came forward without the slightest encouragement as a suitor for Geraldine's hand."

"And Sir Ralph received him as such?"

"Not only that, but sometimes advocates his cause in a manner which distresses me beyond bearing, and

plunges poor Geraldine into despair—for she cannot like him.”

“Why?”

“My dear cousin, let me delay answering till you have spent a few hours in this man’s society. Perhaps you may still remain unable to specify the exact reason to yourself; but you will let the question pass!”

“Humph—not unlikely; I mean—I see. But Ralph would never force her inclinations?”

“To do him justice, I do not believe he would; but his demeanour on the subject sometimes makes me—makes me actually doubt, Tom Clinton, his being perfectly sane!”

There was a pause after this last sentence, which was uttered in a sort of thrilling whisper. Clinton mused, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

“Lucy,” said he at last, suddenly lifting his eyes and fixing them on her countenance, “tell me, is your lawyer, old Wright, aware of all this?”

“I have reason to think he knows something; but you must not hope for information from him—a confidential agent.”

“Still I have managed to extract something from him,” said Tom, proud of his diplomatic skill. “Not much; but the end of the clue may be therein. We shall see. Have you ever heard the name ‘Thornfield?’”

“Thorn—field? I think not—stay! Some one surely did mention that name once in my hearing—Thornfield—yes! I remember that was the name of a man who was nearly killed at Haverton some years ago—it was at



the railway-station. A little child, belonging to one of the railway-men, had strayed on to the line as the express train rushed up; and this Thornfield dashed forward and saved the child at the risk of his own life. It was much spoken of at the time. Can this be the man you mean?"

"Um—very likely. But have you no further knowledge of the man,—never seen him in company with Ralph?"

"By the by, I think I *was* told Ralph and he had been seen walking together in the park on that very occasion, but beyond that I am utterly ignorant who or what he may be; and, to tell the truth, I had entirely forgotten the transaction till you mentioned the name."

"I have reason to believe, however, that he may be an important agent in carrying out our plans—for plans we must have, Lucy,—mines and countermines; and see if we don't blow the enemy's works sky high. Courage! I am more than sanguine about getting the end of the clue."

Lady Maudesley smiled languidly in reply to Clinton's cheering anticipations, but she did not immediately answer, and Tom, looking at her pale lips, which moved without uttering any sound, was alarmed.

"You have over-exerted yourself; you are faint. I should have remembered that you have not been strong." Thus spoke the colonel, much distressed at his own inadvertence. "Perhaps I had better ring?"

"No, thank you, cousin; no. I shall be better in a moment. But I cannot talk long at any time without being fatigued; and on a subject such as this"—

"Enough to make any one ill. I am a sad blunderer—always was; but if I can blunder my way through these toils—eh?—*then* I shall come hopefully to ask forgiveness for my rough treatment. Now, rest; let me place the cushions—there!"

"Many, many thanks! dear cousin."

"I shall go now and look about me. What o'clock is it? Five—and you dine at seven; time for a stroll. Ah, by the by, where can I hope to fall in with my god-daughter?"

"In the garden, I should say. You can pass through that open window. But you must be tired. Will you not go to inspect your quarters? If so, pray ring."

"Not till I have had a stroll. Think how we town *habitués* pine after the country air, and how sweetly the scent of the late roses comes through the open window. *Au revoir!*—I go to make search for my lady fair, but in no case shall my ears be shut to the sound of the dressing-bell." And the colonel vanished through the portal indicated, leaving Lady Maudesley reclining with closed eyes on the cushions placed by his hand. She did not slumber, but she was not without her waking visions of sunlight piercing the clouds which had so long overshadowed her existence. As thus she lay, a shadow from a real substance intercepted the ray which streamed through the window by which Clinton had gone out—her evil genius. St Alban peered into the room for a moment, saw the reclining figure on the couch, hesitated, then noiselessly retreated as he had come, and vanished among the shrubs.

When the party assembled that evening at the dinner-table, Clinton had not done bantering Geraldine on the bashful reserve with which, he asserted, she had greeted him on his first presenting himself before her at a sudden turn of one of the green alleys. Certainly it had vanished by this time, for the fair damsel had not been in such spirits for many days, even though her *bête noir* regarded her, from the opposite side of the table, with that customary look of melancholy respect for which she could have killed him, or thought she could. That gentleman was, however, less demonstrative than usual, for he had seen that in Colonel Clinton's eye, upon being introduced to him, which he perfectly understood, very naturally objected to, and, under existing circumstances, somewhat feared.

Sir Ralph Maudesley, who was really glad to see his old friend, played the part of a courteous host sufficiently well; and Mr Docksay, who had a high respect for the baronet, as in duty bound, liked what he had seen of Clinton, and was always gratified, "good, easy man," by the deferential demeanour of Mr St Alban, enjoyed himself to the full,—none the less, perhaps, that he had left at home the partner of his affections, who was wont occasionally to interfere with the didactic flow of his stately periods.

Mr St Alban had been disagreeably surprised, on his arrival, by the fact which was announced to him of Clinton's presence there. He would have given worlds to have overheard the conversation which was taking place in the draw-

ing-room between this new guest and Lady Maudesley, but he could not manage it. He had heard of Colonel Thomas Clinton, and considered his presence there a very bad ingredient in the mess he was preparing. He even pondered an alteration in certain plans he had formed with reference to this visit; but, after mature consideration, and some inquiry as to the locality of the colonel's bedroom, he had decided to let things take their prearranged course; and he assumed a look which he conceived to be one of mournful depression, and kept rather in the background. Mr St Alban was a man of considerable coarse cleverness, and was not wanting in a sort of vulgar tact.

The evening passed away as evenings may be supposed to do in a large country house, with a small circle not quite congenial in its elements. Sir Ralph and Mr Docksay played chess; Clinton and his goddaughter conversed gaily in an undertone on many subjects; and Lady Maudesley having retired as usual at an early hour, Mr St Alban was driven to take refuge in the columns of the *Times*, from behind which he occasionally peered at the last-named couple, and took mental notes of the few scraps of their conversation he could catch. He was not in a good humour, that gentleman. Surely there is nothing in the paper he is reading to make him so bite his nether lip, for it is the advertisement sheet he has possessed himself of, and for some time after he commenced its perusal it was upside down. Geraldine saw, and, I am afraid, rejoiced over his discomfiture. "Godfather," whispered she, on the party separat-

ing for the night, "I do beg and pray that you will remain as long as you possibly can." There was real, earnest entreaty in the tone and look, and Clinton laughed, and promised he would not hurry away from quarters which presented so many *agrémens*.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A STARTLING INCIDENT.

"WE have nothing to offer you, Clinton, in the shape of amusement," said Sir Ralph Maudesley next day, apologetically. "An awkward time of the year. Shooting not commenced. There is trout, however, in the Warleigh brook, if you care for fishing."

The party of last evening, with the exception of Lady Maudesley, who had not appeared, and Mr Docksay, who had not stayed over the night, having breakfasted, were lounging about the drawing-room.

"My dear Sir Ralph, I care for nothing at present but seeing as much as I can of my relations in the short time I have arranged to spare."

"Short time—and you an idle man? Really, Clinton"——

"No one so little at leisure as a thorough idler, you know. But—hum—a—I have much to talk over after so long an absence. You will walk with me, won't you, by and by, and shew me what is what,—your improvements, and so forth?"

"Certainly," said Sir Ralph, a little puzzled by the em-

barrassment which was visible in Clinton's tone; "at your service always. Not to-day though, I fear; I have some dry business which must be attended to—those confounded elections. Of course, you are aware we are to have a struggle here?"

"Ah, I had heard so. But politics form no part of my vocation. I shall not attempt either to aid or impede you in that matter. You are not a candidate, I presume?"

"No; my health does not admit of any such labours."

"Your health? My dear Sir Ralph, I am distressed to learn that you have been suffering in that way. You should try coming out a little more prominently in public affairs."

"That is the last thing which would suit my case."

"I am no judge of those matters; still, where a malady is on the spirits, I have heard that a little exertion will do wonders. 'Fling but a stone,' you know—eh?" said Thomas Clinton, the arch-diplomatist. But have *you* found it so, Thomas? Have you indeed slain *your* giant so? Shallow theorist! Your argument is but froth on the lip, and melts, as it deserves, into thin air!

"The stone in this instance would be pretty sure to fly back and brain the slayer," quoth the baronet, moodily. "But pardon me; I must leave you, with the simple request that you will spare none of the resources of this place, which are all at your command. There are books in the library, horses in the stable, walks about the grounds commanding views, and there," indicating Geraldine, who was moving pettishly from spot to spot, followed by St Alban,

—"there is a guide who will lead you as wild a scramble as you will care to undertake; and let her not lull you to forgetfulness of the fact that luncheon is at two. *Au revoir!*"

Sir Ralph, accompanied by Mr St Alban, left the room, and they were almost immediately seen driving down the avenue.

"Belle Geraldine," said Colonel Clinton, "every glad twitter of these restless swallows is a reproach to us for not sharing their enjoyment, as far as wingless bipeds may. *Allons!*—your bonnet—your bonnet, and such *et-ceteras* as are indispensable for a stroll."

"I shall be very glad. I was going to occupy myself in the garden, but you had rather not look on at that operation, I daresay."

"Truly, no! Gardens are gardens everywhere; but the crisp, fresh turf, and the breezes laden with the perfume of lime blossoms, are your peculiar privileges, happy rustics! Can Lady Maudesley spare you?"

"Oh, yes. Mamma will not come down for an hour or two, and she will accept the plea on which I absent myself for a portion of this morning. So, as my bonnet is on the hall table, and I require no *et-ceteras*, thank you, but a parasol"—

"*Allons!* I place myself under your care, therefore hold yourself responsible for all mischief from wild cattle, and such like country horrors."

"Or gipsies; a stray child has been abstracted before now."



"Satirist! respect my gray hairs. Come! the few moments given to fidgeting about and collecting *et-ceteras* preparatory to a stroll are always devoted to irony; let elderly single gentlemen beware thereof."

As they went down the broad avenue, its stately elms had not for many days resounded with mirth so genuine as that which woke the echoes now. Without any particular plan, the twain slowly sauntered along, soon leaving the broad path for one or other of the devious green alleys which diverged from it in every direction, until it would have puzzled Clinton to have found his way back, at a hasty summons, unguided. And so they wandered on, enjoying the shade and the fragrance of the herbage, and the sound of the multitudinous insect life busy amongst the foliage overhead. At last the view, suddenly disclosed, of a small rustic lodge shewed that they were approaching the limits of the park.

"The west lodge," said Geraldine, "the most secluded, and, I think, prettiest of all."

The occupant of this habitation was apparently busying himself among some bee-hives in a little garden appertaining to it. This personage was rather a character in his way. He had been body-servant, as well as gardener, to old Mr Milward long ago, and, at the time of that gentleman's demise, had retired on a small pension, eked out by his own savings; but, on the return of his *old young* mistress (as we may term her) to England, after her husband's unlooked-for accession to fortune, he had been taken on the establishment at Maudesley Hall, and, after some

changes of position therein, had finally settled down in what was nearly a sinecure—the care of the little west lodge. He was a Scotchman, a single man, about seventy years of age or more, very hale, though somewhat crippled by rheumatism, and was assisted in his housekeeping by an elderly woman, who had been transferred, on the ground of incapacity, from a situation in the poultry-yard. She had been disinclined, it appeared, to progress with the march of improvement in her peculiar sphere, and the baronet's fowls were, according to Mrs Docksay, "a shame to be seen." Sandy Rutherford himself had been originally placed on the indoors establishment, but certain eccentricities of his, which had at first amused Sir Ralph, began to be wearisome, as the spirits of the latter deteriorated, and it was thought advisable, when the west lodge was erected, that Sandy should be placed there, this being carefully represented to him as being a piece of preferment. In truth, his eccentricities had been of a very harmless nature, though 'at times inconvenient when guests happened to be at the hall, for Sandy, like other people, had his partialities, which he would give effect to in such pieces of by-play as indicating the best potato in the dish he might be handing; peremptorily re-filling the glass of the favoured one, and so forth; and not unfrequently, poor man, he would chorus the general mirth on the occasion of humorous remark, making audible comments thereon, all of which tended to upset the decent gravity of the other domestics; so the *fiat* went forth, and Sandy Rutherford was translated.

Both ladies of the hall were in the habit of coming to spend half-an-hour, for old acquaintance' sake, in gossip with old Sandy. He had been an old acquaintance of Clinton's also in very happy days, but his sight was getting impaired, and he did not at once recognise him as he approached.

"I'm watchin' thae skeps; I'm thinkin' it'll be nigh time to be pittin' doon yin o' them; but I've been awfu' bad wi' the lumbagy, an' I cudna win to Haverton," said he, retaining his seat, and peering intently through the little glass slide at the back of the hive.

"To Haverton, Sandy? What should take you all that distance just now?"

"Ou, just for brumstane for smeeikin', ye ken; Nancy, she would ha' gaen, but she's had a beilin' tae. I never saw the like o' the way things gang a' wrang thegither, whiles."

With this comprehensive lamentation Sandy raised his eyes, which were adorned with horn spectacles, and surveyed the pair.

"Gude day to ye, sir—but, keep me! I dinna ken ye; I ask your honour's pardon—I took ye for Monkshood Vale."

"For whom?" asked Clinton.

"He means Mr St Alban," interposed Geraldine *sotto voce*, and with rather an angry flush on her cheek. "But, pray, Sandy, what should I be doing walking alone with Mr St Alban? A thing you never saw, I am sure."

"Hoot, ye ken best, bairn. Ye see, yer honour, I'm

unco free wi' Miss Geraldine; but I mind the time when I used to carry her mamaw on my shoulder, and gie her barley-sugar draps and bulls' een. 'Deed, I never saw ye, nor do I want to see ye, Missy; an' if ye're as saucy as ye've a right to be, ye need never be evenin' yoursel' wi' the like o' Monkshood Vale."

"Don't disturb yourself, Sandy, and don't talk that way, please, or I shall be in a pet some day. Are you not going to tell Colonel Clinton you are glad to see him?"

"Cornel Clinton! Captain Tammas Clinton—is that possible?" said the old man, getting up and coming forward as rapidly as his infirmity permitted. "Captain Tammas Clinton that sud ha' been your—hech! humph, weel-a-weel—let's look at ye, captain," and he came close to the colonel, and peered into his face, while the latter, who had been much alarmed at the tenor of the old man's remarks, submitted laughingly. Sandy muttered, as he looked, in a low tone, which was scarcely audible to Geraldine who stood by:—

"Ye had red cheeks yince—that's gane—and yer hair's as white's mine nigh hand. What's that wi', laddie? Hae ye no gotten ower *yon* yet, for a' ye've dune and seen to mak' ye forget? There's colour aneuch in your cheeks noo, but it's no the bonny red and white that was aye there, I mind, when ye were a laddie."

"Time will not stand still with any of us, my old friend," said Clinton, a little impatiently, for the old man's reminiscences were of a most inconvenient nature.

"'Deed, that's true; I whiles wish it would either stand

still, or gang faster, for it's aye slowest when it brings mischief wi't. Weel, weel," continued he, relinquishing, with a kind of groan, his study of Clinton's features, "ye were a weel-lookin' lad yince."

Clinton gladly seized the opportunity thus afforded for giving a mirthful tone to the proceedings, and he remonstrated facetiously upon the implied falling-off of his personal attractions. The old man added, apologetically as it were, "But it wasna sae muckle the shape o' the face, and the bonny colour i' the cheeks, as the blink ye had in the twa een o' ye, Captain Tammas; weel I mind it, an' *that's* aye there yet, just the same."

"The *amende honorable*," said Geraldine. "You're a courtier, Sandy."

"I may be, for I dinna ken what ye mean, bairn. But hoo lang will ye be stoppin', sir, if ye please?"

"Only a few days, Sandy, for which reason, you see, I lose no time in looking up my old friends."

"It's very mindfu' o' ye. Ye'll no see me here lang though; I'm gettin' gey sair failed. No that I'm an auld man, but thae pains is very hard on a body—I kenna what for I should be sae troubled wi' them. Very auld folk maist aye has them; but I'm but jimp the threescore and ten yet."

"Well," said Clinton, as they turned to pursue their ramble, "you must take care of yourself, old friend; good people are scarce, you know."

"Ay," quoth the old man, hobbling a few paces with them as if loath to cut short his gossip, "I tell't Maister

Docksay that yince ; but, says he, They 're no sae scarce as folk say—rael oot-an-oot bad yins is far scarcer ; an' I mindna what he said, but he made it clear to me somehow. But I could pit my hand on ane or twa for a' that, gey near at hand ; it wud tak ye to say what's gude about *them*."

Clinton and his fair companion having with some difficulty accomplished their final adieux—for the floodgates of poor Sandy's eloquence were being rapidly loosened—now retraced their steps homewards, the colonel having first been compelled to promise another visit before taking his departure from Maudesley Hall. In fact, he had been rather struck with some of the old man's remarks, and was uncertain whether, in a *tête-à-tête* conversation, he might not glean something from him which might be useful. Lady Maudesley received them on their return, looking pale and worn, Clinton thought, and, he imagined, was rather disappointed that he had not been with Sir Ralph ; but as he again assured her that the duration of his stay would depend entirely on his progress in her service, she was satisfied, and became quite cheerful and sanguine. Sir Ralph and Mr St Alban did not shew themselves till the dinner-bell summoned all and sundry, the party on this occasion being the same as on the preceding evening, with the exception of Mr Docksay, who, as above mentioned, had gone home then, he being in the habit of preparing himself on the Friday and Saturday for the duties of the following day.

Mr St Alban was suffering under some sort of indisposi-

tion; so much so as to attract the notice of Colonel Clinton, who thought he had rarely seen so ghastly an expression on the countenance of a person in professedly tolerable health. So much indeed was this the case, that at one time he felt in common courtesy called upon to remark it, and to make some inquiry as to whether the gentleman in question was unwell. The latter made a hurried and rather incoherent reply, to the effect that he had over-exerted himself in attending to some matters of business, after a sleepless night previously, "A common occurrence with him," he said, "when any anxiety weighed upon his mind—there would be a close contest for the county, as things had turned out—great danger of a loss to their party—and parties were terribly evenly balanced in the House."

Little comment was made upon this statement, which was given forth confusedly, and after the manner of one pressed by bodily ailment; and Mr St Alban, after swallowing a good deal of wine very quickly—indeed he forgot to go through the ceremony of passing the bottles at all, and neither of his companions cared to remind him of his negligence—got up from table, and expressing his intention of taking a stroll in the open air, left the other two gentlemen alone. Thomas Clinton became very nervous and fidgety.

"Ought I to lose this opportunity?" thought he; "shall I take the bull by the horns?"

As he pondered, the opportunity was lost.

"You are not drinking wine," said his host, "neither am I—an abstemious couple—shall we go to the ladies?"

I have papers to arrange, and will ask you, *sans ceremonie*, to excuse me for an hour."

"Hem! hem!" coughed the colonel, "I was rather anxious to—to"—

"To hear about the forthcoming struggle? Oh! pooh, St Alban exaggerates the danger in this matter—the Maudesley interest is still more than half the battle—our candidate is safe enough. But it is creditable to St Alban that he takes such an interest in this, for he had a wish to stand himself, though it was not thought practicable under the circumstances."

"Ah! I daresay—but it was not that exactly."

"Ha, ha! I forgot; you are one of the Philistines, Tom—a misguided votary of Conservatism. Never mind, we will have a stroll together to-morrow, and talk over many subjects new and old. Coffee in the drawing-room, Merton, for Colonel Clinton, and a cup for me in the library."

There was no help for it, and thus had passed the first day at Maudesley Hall, without any direct progress being made. Still, was it to be expected that a matter so delicate and difficult of approach could be brought on the *tapis* all at once? Clinton thought, on a calm retrospect of the day's proceedings, that he had not done badly after all. The evening passed away very tranquilly. Sir Ralph reappeared in about an hour, as he had given notice, and Mr St Alban returned from a "long quiet saunter," he said, "among the elms, which had set him all right;" but he did not look so exactly, for his cheek was still pale and



ghastly, and there was a mark of blood on his under lip, as though in some spasm of pain he had set his teeth hard there. Sir Ralph Maudesley watched him with a sort of dull curiosity, and Clinton felt more and more confirmed in his belief that he had before him not only the object of Mr Wright's animadversions, but also one of the "ane or twa" alluded to in an uncomplimentary strain by Sandy Rutherford. Therefore, the party having separated for the night, the colonel sat himself down in an arm-chair in his bedroom, to revolve these and other things, and try to set his plans in working order.

Now, midnight meditations, especially on the part of a very methodical elderly person, who has spent the greater part of the day in the open air, are not likely to lead to great results. In the present instance, after an ineffectual struggle to keep his ideas distinct and lucid, Thomas Clinton found past, present, and future beginning to mingle in a confused chaos, merged, every now and then, in complete oblivion. So, after the third or fourth start, and brisk assault upon his nose and eyelids, he came to the conclusion that he had been thinking utter nonsense for some time past, and had better go to bed—and to bed he went accordingly.

How long he had been there asleep, he could not at the moment tell, but his slumbers were suddenly interrupted in a most startling manner by a shriek,—this first one proceeded from a mysterious female with whom alone he was travelling on some unexplained mission in a railway carriage of fantastic design, but it was piercing enough to

start him bolt upright in bed, and then another and another rung through the corridor, driving Queen Mab from his brain with all her retinue pell-mell. He was out of bed in a moment, and huddling on whatever garments came first to hand. There was a faint glimmering of moonlight in the room, and he never stopped to strike a light, when, just as his finger closed upon the door-handle, another sound rang sharply on his ear, making him recoil for a moment in amazement—but for a moment, for the sound was that of a pistol shot, and he now dashed open the door, and sped along the passage, while, as he ran, the silent house became alive with the clang of doors, the noise of hurrying feet, and the clamour of voices. Finding his way somehow, Clinton stood at the threshold of Sir Ralph Maudesley's dressing-room.

To explain, however, that which here met the colonel's astonished gaze, we must "hark back" a short space, and accompany sundry other members of the party to their repose.

Sir Ralph Maudesley had retired as usual to rest, spending some time previously, according to his custom, in his dressing-room, which adjoined the joint sleeping apartment of himself and Lady Maudesley, the former chamber being partly fitted up as a sitting-room, in so far that writing materials and a cabinet or two containing papers and other matters of private interest were kept there. Geraldine's room was next that of her mother on the other side, but did not communicate with it, except from the corridor outside.

Sir Ralph was more restless even than usual this night. He began a train of thoughts also, much as his guest did, but he wanted that habitual calmness of spirit, not to mention health of body, which would have conduced to meditation ending in repose. His thoughts were not, perhaps, much more to the purpose than Clinton's were, but they possessed a feverish distinctness and lucidity which were thoroughly antagonistic to sleep. Thus he lay, hearing more than one hour strike from the little clock on the mantelpiece, and watching the gradually-growing distinctness of objects in the room, as his eye became accustomed to the darkness, which was soon slightly broken by the feeble rays of a waning moon. Lady Maudesley, on her part, slept tranquilly, being somewhat exhausted, and, at the same time, soothed by the general course of things during the last two days.

All at once, a sound broke on Sir Ralph's ear, which stood out in salient distinctness from the gentle monotonous ticking of the French clock. The creaking of a board, as if under the pressure of a heavy but stealthy foot-tread in the corridor. Sir Ralph's nervous system was at all times, and especially at night, on hair-springs. He held his breath and listened, while his heart played a sort of bass to the treble of the clock. 'Pooh! nonsense—but the thought had scarcely died away, and his head, which he had raised an inch or so from the pillow, been once more replaced there, when he heard distinctly, and beyond a doubt, that which made him spring up to a sitting posture

with a smothered exclamation. Lady Maudesley awoke, and was terrified by his gesture.

“Ralph! what is the matter?”

“Hush!”

Sir Ralph Maudesley, like many men of excitable nervous temperament, was physically brave enough when actually called upon to exert that quality; besides, he could not realise the idea of anything being so far wrong as to involve personal danger. His first thought, on collecting his ideas, was that some one of the servants was prowling about his private apartment, for which there could be neither reason nor warrant. Hastily enjoining silence on his much-agitated helpmate, he got softly out of bed, and proceeded to array himself in his dressing-gown—while thus occupied, a sound was heard which dispelled any uncertainty as to the general character of the transactions which were taking place in the next room. A piece of furniture was overturned, and a smothered sound, as of a curse in a man’s voice was heard. Sir Ralph, who had in the meantime, after sundry failures, struck a light, threw open the door of communication between the two rooms, and at once found himself confronted by the figure of a man whose appearance left no room for doubt on the subject of his intentions, inconceivable as it was, that he should have got there on such an errand. A crape band partly concealed his features, and he carried in his hand a small lantern, which was lighted. He started back with an exclamation, which Sir Ralph, stupified as he was with amazement, recognised as being French

"*Sacré!*" growled he between his teeth, in a sort of fierce whisper; "*est ce qu'il m'a trompé?*"——

The next moment the taper was dashed from the baronet's hand, and he was on his back on the floor, with the stranger's knee on his chest, and fingers gripping his throat.

"*L'argent!—la monnaie!—vite!*" hissed the ruffian, alternately strengthening and relaxing his gripe, as though uncertain how to act.

Lady Maudesley, who had been paralysed with astonishment, at this moment uttered a piercing scream. It was the only effort of which she was capable, for the next instant she was lying back in a swoon. The robber uttered curse upon curse in French and broken English, as he started to his feet, dragging the baronet with him.

"Help!—murder!" gasped the latter, nearly choked, and quite powerless in the hands of his athletic antagonist. In a frenzy of terror, Geraldine now appeared on the scene, and, horror-struck by what she saw, while utterly unable to comprehend its meaning, gave utterance to shriek upon shriek, while the robber, alarmed, and foaming with rage, though still retaining his grasp on Sir Ralph's collar, seemed utterly at a loss how to proceed.

The matter was settled for them all in a way the intruder at least little expected.

Almost simultaneously with the last scream which issued from the lips of the terrified girl, who, as if by instinct, had darted past towards the bedroom, where Lady Maudesley lay insensible, a hurried footstep was heard in the corridor,

and a form appeared at the door of the dressing-room—that of Mr St Alban. The robber, releasing his hold on Sir Ralph as his eyes met those of the new comer, uttered an exclamation which expressed a sort of mixture of fury, bewilderment, doubt, and menace.

*“ Vous voila ! Scélérat ! est ce possible que tu m’as trahi ? ”*

The execration which accompanied these words was his last. The report of a pistol, for all other answer, rang sharply through the apartment, and, with one convulsive spring, clutching wildly at the empty air in the direction of his slayer, the robber fell heavily backwards, and lay a dead man.

Geraldine’s shrieks, and incessant peals at the bell in her mother’s room, continued to resound through the house, which was now, however, fairly startled from its quiescent state, and, amid a confused hubbub of voices, feet were heard hurrying in every direction towards the scene of action. Sir Ralph Maudesley sat up on the carpet, leaning his back against a sofa, and holding one hand to his forehead, apparently unable fully to realise the nature of the rescue. St Alban, without uttering a word, stooped over the corpse, peering into its upturned face—his pistol was a six-barrelled revolver, and his finger was on the trigger, ready. In a moment or two, he stood upright, and gently placed the weapon on a table by his side—it had done its work. Boldly conceived, Mr St Alban, and well executed—a round upon the ladder won—a stumbling-block removed for ever by one vigorous

thrust. You may well smile, Mr St Alban; but take heed, compose your features, there is one at hand whose scrutiny might be dangerous.

It was at this moment that Clinton appeared upon the scene. Our readers can now imagine the spectacle which met his gaze. Servants began to crowd round in every state of dishabille. Sir Ralph Maudesley, removed to the sofa, was having his forehead bathed with water by Mr St Alban, and on the floor lay the body of a man, a crape-mask half off his features, and a thin stream of blood welling slowly from his temples.

Clinton's first thought was of Lady Maudesley. She was, however, being well cared for; in addition to Geraldine, one or two female servants, including her own woman, were busy about her, and ministering to her as well as their own alarmed state would permit. And she had gradually returned to consciousness, attaining a partial perception of what had occurred—that there had been an attempt at robbery which had been defeated—and that all was well. It was not thought necessary or advisable to acquaint her, that the grim falcon death had just stricken a quarry within a few feet of where she lay.

Hurried directions were now given as to the removal of the dead body. "Was he quite dead? As mutton—as a herring—as a door-nail"—were the different responses, tending to the same conclusion, from the half-dozen open-mouthed domestics.

"Take the carrion away—some of the outhouses will

do," continued St Alban, who appeared to assume the direction of affairs. Sir Ralph made an effort to regain his composure, and spoke, though faintly.

"There is an empty lock-up shed behind the old harness-room," said he, raising himself to a sitting posture. "There will have to be an inquiry, of course. Some one must ride to Haverton at daylight with a note to Captain Jones." (This was the chief constable of the county.) "He will communicate with the coroner, and arrange how it is to be."

Mr St Alban listened in silence; but his teeth were again busy on that abraded underlip of his. He started, as the domestics proceeded shrinkingly to lift the dead body.

"I will see him safe stowed," muttered he, hastily.

But Sir Ralph, now almost himself again, protested against this as unnecessary. They would all be the better of a few hours' sleep; for himself, he should lie down on the sofa there, as soon as Lady Maudesley should become sufficiently composed to be left alone—that is, with her daughter's company only, for, of course, Geraldine would not leave her.

"I—I—it is probable I may have been indebted to you for my life, St Alban," continued he, turning towards that gentleman with no very good grace.

"There were those near," replied St Alban, struggling with a certain huskiness, but with an effort, nevertheless, to make his words loud and distinct, "who should—hem—hem—have been made welcome to mine."



Thomas Clinton heard, understood, and, in his turn, gnawed his lip.

"This may complicate matters," thought he, as he slowly retired in the direction of his own apartment. "I'd give a round sum this had not happened."

When Mr St Alban regained the privacy of his chamber, he sat for a moment in deep thought, with his chin sunk on his breast. Then he sprang up and commenced pacing back and forward with a smile on his lip. This again gradually died away, giving place, first, to an expression of serious meditation, which increased to one of intense anxiety, as he strode to and fro.

"An inquiry!" he is muttering; "double d——n the inquiry! I suppose it is sure to come off, however—justifiable homicide, no doubt—ha! ha! I must not be present—must be ill—a hundred miles off, if I can, and as much more as I can put between me and them, for *he* will be there, with his devil's cunning, like a bloodhound, as he is, and on a breast-high scent!"

The servants of the house, meantime, finding that day would shortly be breaking, instead of going to bed again, conversed over the inexplicable fact of the robber's ingress.

"There is not an open cranny, not a loose bolt or broken bar anywhere, as far as I can see," said the butler. "To be sure, I've not had time for a regular search; but I'm hopeful there's no blame to any of us servants in the matter."

"Well, Mr Merton, I'm hopeful of that too," said one of the under footmen. "I must say, though—and I'll have

to say it on the inquitich, no doubt—I did hear a step soft-like, as a body might be goin' on's stockin' soles, pass by my door, along the scullery passage."

"Keep us all, George Dutton! about what time might that be? And what for did you not get up and look out o' door?"

"What toime? I can't purcisely say. I fell asleep again about midnight; and for lookin' out, whoy, I thought it were yourself, Mr Merton, an' that were no business o' moine, you know."

"Well, well—it's a mysterious business any way. Lucky as Mr St Alban happened to be sittin' up, for it's down-right impossible he could ha' been in bed, and so quick dressed and there. I had nought but shirt and drawers on myself; and I was thankful my Lady and Miss Geraldine was in the back room."

"Huts, Mr Merton, they had other things to think about; folk has no time to look at a man's legs when their own throat's in danger. And now, as mine's as dry as a brickbat with the flurry and the fuss, if there'd happen to be a drop of beer handy, Mr Merton," &c., &c., &c.

As was naturally to be expected, Lady Maudesley next day kept her room. Geraldine, who remained in close attendance upon her, did not appear at the breakfast-table, and the party consisted of Sir Ralph himself, looking rather more haggard than usual; St Alban, who complained of illness, and had, at all events, some excuse for pre-occupation of mind; and Colonel Clinton, who, feeling less and less satisfied with the possible bearing of last night's events

on his plans, was in a very taciturn mood, like the other two.

"Confound it! he will be coming forward, of course, in the character of knight-rescuer," thought he, as he glanced uneasily at the pale features of his brother-guest, who had certainly never looked to less advantage than he did on that occasion. But if the lookers-on imagined that Mr St Alban's conscience was heavy under the pressure of blood lately shed, they were wide of the mark.

It was not a pleasant meal altogether that breakfast, and no one felt himself inclined to protract it. Sir Ralph's meditations and those of Thomas Clinton were strangely akin; as for those of the remaining member of the party, let them be for the present as a sealed book. Taking his host by the arm, as they rose from table, (the fingers shook a little, but surely that was natural,) St Alban requested a few words in private, before taking his departure for home.

"For home!" Sir Ralph had understood that his guest was to have made a much longer stay.

"True—I had so hoped; but unmistakable symptoms tell me that I have an attack of illness coming on. Nothing of consequence; but an event like that of last night—I was not in a fit state—hem—hem—in fact, I must have rest somewhere; and I may even decide to go abroad for a week or two."

Sir Ralph, though surprised, very readily assented. With a brief apology to Clinton, the other two left the room together; and Tom heard St Alban say to his host, as they

passed into the entrance-hall, "You will explain my absence to the coroner, Maudesley? I am really equal to no further agitation for the present." And he also heard Sir Ralph assure his guest that there could be no necessity for his personal attendance, if he felt it to be such an ordeal. But the baronet and Clinton alike were rather mystified by the alleged weakness of that gentleman's nervous system. And Thomas lit a cigar, and betook himself very moodily to the lawn in front of the hall.

He had not paced up and down there long when he became aware of an approaching figure, whereof the lineaments were familiar. This was old Sandy Rutherford, coming as if from the offices in rear of the house, whither, no doubt, he had been to inspect the result of last night's skirmish. This he himself now proclaimed to be the case.

"I've been takin' a look at the corp," said he, after saluting the colonel by raising his old brown hat for a moment, and replacing it on one side, thereby communicating to his withered brown features a sort of quaint, janty expression. "A stour-lookin' deevil. An' lead's just cheatit hemp, I think."

"Are you an amateur of such sights, Sandy?" asked Clinton.

"A what? Maybe ay, and maybe no," answered Sandy, who, unless from the pulpit, disliked remarks which he did not understand; "but a' folk gangs to look at a corp. An' there was a cur'ous thing aboot this ane;" here he placed his walking-stick between his knees, for the better convenience of taking a pinch of snuff.

"What was that, Sandy? Was the wound not sufficient to account for death, think you?"

"Accoont for death! Lord bless ye! yon shot would hae killed a bill.\* But the cur'ous thing is,—an' if I hadna had the luck to meet yer honour, I was thinkin' to speer for ye, for somebody should ken'd that has the sense to guide it,—it's my firm opeenion I've seen yon neger afore."

"Ay? That is curious enough," said Tom, rather interested.

"Deed is 't. An' so ye'll say when I've tell't ye a' that's aboot it. But, ere I say ony mair, cornel, ye maun promise me ae thing—and that's, that I'll no be pu'd forrit on the inquitich, as they ca'd; I dinna like thae inquitiches. I wadna like to say onything aboot a dead man that's no true; an' I couldna just sweer to this, though I could gang nigh hand it. Onyway, I wouldna like to be pit on my aith anent it, for it micht bring me into trouble."

After some attempts to waive this point, Clinton thought it best to humour the old man, and promise to consider his revelation, whatever it might be, as made under trust. Sandy then proceeded:—

"I was sayin' I've seen yon chield afore. Whaur d'ye think it was,—and whan? Jist doon in the wee fir plantin' whaur the spring waal is, east frae my hoose, yestreen aboot nicht-fa'."

"But why object to state that? It may be important, and could do no possible harm to any one."

\* *Anglicè*—bull.

"Bide a wee. Wha was wi' him, think ye, lad, for he wasna his lane? As thrang's three in a bed they were. An' the ither ane was—Monkshood Vale!" The old man here sucked in both cheeks, and closed one eye with an air of intense meaning, as he peered sideways up into Clinton's face.

"Do you mean Mr"——

"Maister St Alban," quoth Sandy, nodding slow assent, as Tom paused bewildered; "nae doot about *him* at ony rate. I couldna be just sae sure aboot the ither ane, though I could amaist sweer to him tae; for I took notice o' his claes, every steek o' them."

"This is very strange."

"An' yer honour kens whether Monkshood Vale was wi' you and Sir Ralph and the leddies aboot the gloamin'?"

"By heaven! he was not—I remember. He made an excuse to leave us after dinner," exclaimed Clinton, much struck with what he had heard.

"Exackly," chuckled Sandy Rutherford. "An' twa or three hours after he pits a bullet through yon chield's harns. Pit that an' that thegither, yer honour, cornel, and I think ye'll say there's something no that canny aboot it."

"And this took place near your house—the west lodge?"

"Just there, an' naewhere else," said Sandy. "I had gaen east for a joogfu' o' spring water for the parritch—Nanse's and mine; she gangs hersel' for ord'nar, but she's gotten a sair fit, an' she thinks the water frae the pump

waal gies her the cholery morbish; and I heard a whis-perin'—gey lood, for I think they had coosten oot aboot something—so through the busses I keeked, an' there they were, an' I sat doon on a tree root till they gaed awa'."

Clinton paused, ruminating upon this piece of information.

"Truth is stranger than fiction," thought he. "Can this be the year of grace 18—? This is more like 'Mrs Radcliffe' than a bit of common every-day country life."

"I think they were lookin' at a wee bit paper," continued Sandy; "a bank-note for a' I ken, an' they may ha' been fechtin' aboot the vaily o't; ony way yon chield" (here a turn of the speaker's thumb over his shoulder indicated the stables) "pit it up in his pooch, and they gaed aff thegither gey crooselike, after a'."

"Well, Sandy, this really deserves inquiry."

"Yer honour can dae as ye like aboot that, but ye'll mind yer promise. Onything but harlin' a body up afore the coroner, as they ca' him. But I'm clearly of opeenion that Sir Ralph should hae an inklin' o' what I've tell't ye, for—a word in yer honour's lug"—here the old man sunk his voice to a whisper, and advanced his lips as close as he could to Clinton's ear—"yon falla's past giein' trouble, but—deil kens hoo nigh his *captain* may be!"

Sandy Rutherford, having now fairly disburdened his mind, took himself, as fast as his rheumatism permitted, to his own home, where, as he muttered, "by the time he arrived, his denner would be near ready;" and Clinton, after some further cogitation, decided that Sir Ralph Maudesley

should, as soon as the judicial inquiry was over, be put in possession, for his own private behoof, of the above facts. He was determined, moreover, to make this, if possible, a medium for drawing upon himself a full confidence on the baronet's part. Altogether he saw, or thought he saw, prospective advantage from the new light thrown upon the matter, vague and flickering as it was. Indeed, to tell the truth, it was much too dim for honest Thomas to discern anything clearly by its ray, but he was not without hope that Sir Ralph might find it better adapted to his vision, and would see reason to take into his confidence one whose sincere good faith, at least, he could not doubt.

The inquiry, which took place on the afternoon of the following day, was a mere matter of form. There could not be a clearer case, and, much to the relief of Sir Ralph, the robber's body was removed, for the purpose of sepulture, to the town of Haverton. It had been recognised by various persons connected with that town (among whom was the landlord of the Dog and Duck) whom curiosity had brought to the spot, and by one person, too, who was not at all connected with the neighbourhood; who had come in the train of the county magistrate, and who recognised the corpse as that of a very old friend indeed. He made a good many inquiries in a quiet, indifferent tone, of those Haverton men, who seemed to have known the robber in life, and was much interested in the details of his departure therefrom, but there was nothing extraordinary about the case after all, and he seemed satisfied with what he had seen and heard.



Somehow, the landlord of the Dog and Duck, which was a sort of low sporting-house, and whose owner's reputation was by no means immaculate, felt a sort of intuitive dislike to the above personage, which he grumblingly expressed, as he retired with a companion or two. But there was nothing very formidable about the stranger's appearance, or even peculiar, except that he had a certain foreign look about him. His hair was dark and very short, his complexion sallow, and there was not a superfluous hair to be seen on cheek or chin. As for his eyes—let us here record a certain peculiarity about them; though there were many who felt uneasy under their glance, no two persons had yet been known to agree as to their colour. For his dress—little of that could be seen, as he wore a dark cloth cloak reaching to his knees, and, as if from a habit he had acquired, constantly gathered up with one hand about the lower part of his face.

"I suppose you will leave England now, monsieur," said the coroner, a bluff elderly man, who formed in his person a strong contrast to the slender proportions of him whom he addressed. It was not till on a second view that the vast muscular strength of the latter could be detected, nor could it be judged of at all, cloaked as he was on this occasion.

"Hum—I do not say so, exactly," said he, in quiet tones, which did not go beyond the ears for which they were intended. "There is something here I do not quite understand, and I have much to interest me still in your metropolis." And he departed, carrying with him a hasty copy of a small scrap of paper, which had been found on the

body—he had begged that he might be allowed to take this—“he had a small collection of such things—*tous les goûts*—monsieur was aware.”

The writing on the scrap of paper referred to, seemed unimportant, not to say incomprehensible, and there was nothing like a signature. Indeed it is scarcely correct to term it writing at all, it was more like a rude plan of part of a house-interior. Not an unlikely thing for a gentleman of Monsieur Boulnois's calling to have about him, but arguing a certain connivance on the part of some one acquainted with the premises in question, which in this instance was felt to be impossible. So it was doubtless but a lingering trace of some former scheme, incautiously retained by the robber about his person.

And now Clinton resolved that he would come to an understanding with Sir Ralph, be the issue what it might, and without further delay. The general circumstances of the household favoured this plan. Mr St Alban was for the present gone, had intimated his intention of going abroad for a few weeks, and had, by so doing, shed comparative sunshine on the inmates of the hall. Still, for some reason best known to himself, Sir Ralph's spirits did not acknowledge the benign influence, as those of certain members of his family did. He was more gloomy and abstracted, if possible, than before, and Lady Maudesley, though somewhat relieved by Mr St Alban's absence, had never quite recovered the shock her nerves had sustained two nights previously, and was still unable to leave her room. She had, however, conveyed a brief message through

Geraldine, that she trusted Thomas Clinton would lose no opportunity which might offer of forwarding his good work. Sitting, therefore, *tête-à-tête* with his host on this, the third evening since the occurrence we have narrated, the gallant colonel, after an interval, during which he had mechanically assented to various remarks from the former on indifferent subjects, wheeled round his chair in the very midst of a dreamy disputation on the political leanings of Haverton, hemmed recklessly, and prepared for the assault.

"Maudesley—hem—hem—I want to talk to you on a matter of—hem—paramount importance."

The baronet, much surprised, resigned the nut-crackers, with which he had been endeavouring to emphasise sundry very feeble remarks, and fixed his eyes on the agitated countenance of his guest. The usual sympathetic effect took place, and Sir Ralph felt a palpable tremor pervade his frame, but he had no idea what on earth was coming.

"I have something to do which will involve my leaving you"—

"After so short a visit—and just at present, when—I trust you will at least extend your stay till Lucy feels able to be about again?"

"I hope to be off by to-morrow forenoon—it will very much depend on the result of our present conference—for, as I said, I have something very serious indeed to—to ask."

Sir Ralph, who had half meditated a facetious repudiation of the idea that any steps on his part should expedite his guest's departure, checked himself, and looked uneasily at Clinton.

"Is there any trouble—any embarrassment?—my dear Clinton, if it be in my power"—

"I believe it is—but it is not of myself I am about to speak. In the first place, I have that to communicate which you ought to know, and gravely to reflect upon." Clinton's nerves were now, and continued through the remainder of the conference, as firm as iron. He detailed to Sir Ralph, concisely, but fully, the statement made by old Rutherford.

It was pitiable, at this juncture, to see the bewilderment which pervaded Sir Ralph Maudesley's faculties as he listened. It was, as it were, the last straw being laid on the back of the overladen camel. He groaned aloud and supported his face upon his trembling hands. Clinton looked upon him with a mixture of compassion and wonder, which was not far removed from contempt.

"Good heavens!" thought he, "has this man no share of that quality which goes far to distinguish the human race from the more timid class of brutes—reasoning courage?" But he was determined that the question should be sifted and settled now and for all.

"Should not this—this strange matter have been laid before the coroner?" Sir Ralph at last faltered out, scarcely knowing what he said.

"I was under a promise to confide it to no ears but your own; nor am I quite sure that it may not involve that which is as well kept private, at least for the present; but—I am a man of few words, Maudesley; I am not going to enter upon a lengthened discussion with you ending in

nothing—and I unhesitatingly avow my opinion that *this man* is not to be trusted."

"Trusted!—my God! no."

"Then why *have* you trusted him? Ah, Maudesley, Maudesley, I must not let you remain in ignorance that I know more of this sad business than you are aware. You *have* trusted him; I again ask, why? was there no friend, whom you *knew* to be a friend—whose *honour* would have been guarantee for the safety of your trust?"

"I was a fool—a blind, infatuated fool!"

"It is not—it cannot be too late to avert part, at least, of the consequences. Look here, Maudesley—if I read aright what I have seen and heard, those consequences might be ruin to yourself and to those who should be dearer to you than life."

"Than life—yes—but honour"—

"Honour? Do you mean, Ralph Maudesley, by 'honour,' that immunity from disgrace which lies in concealment? Listen to me; there needed no breach of confidence in any one to instruct me that this man is in possession of facts which make *him* your master—you his slave. In one word—and I care not though you call me a meddling fool for my pains—give me the power to counteract this man's schemings; the secret, whatever it may be, once shared by a third party, loses half its power of mischief vested in the second. Will you, or not, confide in me?"

The wretched baronet made a sort of half effort to resume the ground from which he had first started.

"You mean well, Tom Clinton," said he, tremulously; "but what right have you to assume"—

"Right? I claim none; but, if I did, Ralph Maudesley, remember—have I indeed no right to interfere in the welfare of Lucy Milward? for it is on her account, not yours—your pardon, Maudesley, but it is so—that I seek to interfere."

"I do not ask or expect that it should be otherwise; you have been a true friend ever since we were acquainted with each other; and in this house you may say or do more than any other human being."

"Then trust me in this."

"In this—I do not quite understand you—what is it, exactly, you wish to learn?"

There was a manifest faltering in the baronet's tone, which assured Clinton the game was in his hands.

"There is something wrong in this house—something poisonous at the fountainhead of your family affairs, which taints the whole spring—out with it, man, once for all. Will you go on temporising from day to day, till you find yourself forced into some act that will be worse than destruction to those helpless ones who look to you for bread, not stones? worse to *yourself*," (it flashed across Clinton's mind that he had better not leave out *that* argument.) "Be open with me, Maudesley; has not something passed between you and this man, in connexion with the strange affair of the other night, which has seemed to tighten the noose round you?"

Sir Ralph fixed his eyes upon Clinton's face with an air

of bewilderment. "Is it so apparent?" muttered he, "Can the whole world read me like an open book? For it is true, Heaven help me!"

"Heaven will do nothing of the sort as long as you refuse to help yourself, and resort, instead, to so different an agency. How can you expect it? Come, Maudesley, time flies; once for all, I go to-morrow; whether with or without the means to help you out of this 'slough of despond,' rests with yourself;" and Thomas Clinton, somewhat exhausted, somewhat irritated, and muttering something between his teeth, which was not altogether complimentary to his host, filled a tumbler with water and drained it. The two then lay back, each in his chair, silent, Clinton's eyes fixed on the baronet's chin, which was the only part of his countenance not shrouded by his hands. At last, with a heavy sigh, the latter half raised himself and spoke.

"Tom, I will do as you wish. I cannot imagine—I cannot flatter myself that, at this stage, even you can be of service; but your honour is my sure guarantee against additional misery. What would not I give that in the revelation I am about to make, I could cancel the mad folly of five years ago; for at that time I—I took"—

"I know—a viper to your bosom. Do not trouble yourself to go further into that matter, Maudesley; I know all about it—its torpor was a sham; and it has been stinging you to slow death ever since."

"I shall not stop to inquire how you have learned all this. I have made up my mind what to do, and I shall

do it. Are you aware, Clinton, that Mr St Alban has presented himself as a suitor for my daughter's hand?"

"Aware? Yes—d——n—I mean, unparalleled insolence! But you never seriously intended to countenance his audacity?"

Sir Ralph groaned. "I scarcely know what I intended. I—I temporised, as you say; and, behold the consequences. You remember, on the morning after the attempted robbery, his taking me aside? I know you observed it at the time, for you looked anxious; but I acquiesced, as I have for years past in every proposition he has advanced. He then, in as many words as I am using now, informed me that, conceiving himself to have established an additional claim to gratitude from this family—I am quoting his expression—he should delay no longer putting the final question—was he, or was he not, to be gifted with my daughter's hand? Her heart would, no doubt, under proper management, follow in due time. What a devilish sneer that man can assume, Clinton! I am sure he did not mean it; but, if ever sin was incarnate, it must have worn some such expression as sat on his countenance as he spoke these words. Strange! I never saw that look in times past; but I fancy he is careless now, having me in the toils. But what was I to do?"

"What were you to do?" slowly echoed Clinton. He knew what *he*, what any *man*, would have done under the circumstances; but what use applying the standard of average human feeling to such a shrunken intellect as this? "I suppose you temporised, as usual," quoth Tom.



"I pardon your sneer—I did; and I gained by it at least delay. For one month he will await an answer; at the end of that time, if not volunteered, he will come to demand it."

"And if it be unfavourable"——

"The world will learn that which I am about to confide to *you*."

"Upon my honour, Ralph, I have always hitherto believed that such personages existed but in fiction; and even now I feel as though half in dreamland."

"If that be the case, I had better put off my story"——

"Put off—zounds, man, sit down: procrastination will never do here. Hand me the claret—hum—no, the water—there, I am ready and fit to listen to anything, were it murder—hallo! what ails you now? Begin, for Heaven's sake, at once, and let me be up and doing without more loss of time. I shall pull you out of this, Ralph Maudesley, I shall indeed—if I do it by the ears," continued Tom between his teeth.

The baronet shook his head in mournful despondency. "As you will; but much I fear you will tell a different story before I come to a conclusion. Look here, Clinton, I am going to tell you everything—all, to the minutest particular; you shall have no cause to say that I have kept back one jot or tittle of the truth. Better take some wine—I must—pass me the—the port—thanks!"

And now we shall beg leave to interpolate a few words as to our method of setting Sir Ralph Maudesley's revelations before our readers. They came from his lips hesitat-

ingly and by degrees, and at times the thread had to be supplied by his auditor, and a certain stimulus afforded by question and suggestion. We shall, for convenience' sake, avoid the greater part of such unnecessary matter, and transfer the whole to our pages in the form of a continuous narrative.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SIR RALPH'S STORY.

"At the time when we first met," began the baronet,—he spoke feebly and wearily, at first, but seemed to gather strength from excitement as he proceeded,—“you and I, Clinton, were young men, but, having both arrived at manhood, we were not acquainted with each other's earlier history. My mother died when we—my brother Charles and myself—were still in tender infancy; we had not, therefore, the advantage of her guiding influence in our progress towards maturity. I sometimes ask myself, Is it fortunate for her that she was taken thus early? or, If she had been spared to us longer, would her counsel and instruction have availed to prevent that which took place between us? It is a useless question now, but it often comes to torture me with other fancies which—which—but I will not allow myself to ramble from the matter before me, for I shall indeed require all the strength of which I am possessor to accomplish my task.

“My brother had been—as children of a gentle, pure disposition, I fancy, always must be—ardently attached to his mother. When she died, the whole stock of his warm

affections were concentrated on myself. Much the more powerful in frame, as well as more energetic in character, Charles might have been to me a tyrant; he *was* a protector. If peevish envy at that time found its way but seldom into my breast, it was because a wish on my part for aught belonging to him was scarcely formed ere gratified, if it was his righteously to give. So much for the nature of our childish relations with each other. Instance upon instance I could particularise (for they are seared and burnt into my memory to the minutest feature) of his noble conduct as a boy, bearing high presage of honour for the future man. But those are digressions, and are useless, for the sting inflicted by such recollections is of no avail now to any one, and is a cause of agony to myself."

We may interpolate that, at such moments as these, Sir Ralph generally paused for the purpose of refilling and draining his glass.

"My father sent us both to Eton; afterwards to Oxford. No pains were spared, no expense grudged, as was natural in one of his means, to render his sons fit for the world, according to his notions of what fitness for the world was. Anything else, he left it to ourselves to form our opinions upon as we might see fit. Always a man of the world, and that only, the bettering influence of my mother's precepts and example was lost to him, ere the good seed had time to take root. After her death, his grief found solace, or sought it, in a renewed immersion in the vortex of society, and the sports of the field, each in their turn. A false and fleeting source of comfort in bereavement; the excitements

pall—the anodynes lose their power—and, behold, the wound dealt perhaps for good by a merciful Physician has become a gangrene! So was it with my father, Sir Reginald Maudesley. The means by which he had sought to deaden reflection failing, he resorted to others more delusive still—the oblivion of the wine cup. No need to linger on this theme—he died—and my brother, at the age of two or three and twenty, became possessor of his title and estates.

“He, of course, assumed at first the place which was his own in the hall of our ancestors. I, two years his junior, was destined for a career in the diplomatic world, and I saw no reason at the time to wish this plan altered. Accordingly, soon afterwards, I went to fill a subordinate position in the legation at Copenhagen. The life thus chalked out for me suited me well enough,—better, I believe, than the more brilliant one allotted to Charles harmonised with his tastes. The gay world, so called, was to him a bugbear; the sports of the field, as pursued in Great Britain, were paltry and wearisome to one who had read eagerly of foreign travel, and the excitements attending the pursuit of nobler game than our isle harbours in her coverts. He was, besides, deeply enamoured of the idea of travel for its own sake—the study of all that was strange in character, where the laws of convention were unknown.

“With these tastes, as you may imagine, Maudesley Hall saw comparatively little of its young owner. He soon built or purchased a large yacht; and on board of this vessel, which was manned by a carefully-picked crew,

he spent the greater portion of each year. I saw a good deal of him at Florence, after my removal to that legation, and there, if I remember right, the author of evil instilled the first active poison drop of envy into my heart.

“As I have said, I did not dislike the life of an *attaché*; far from it; the *far niente* suited me in many ways; but that very absence of any settled purpose in existence,—any tangible share in the serious business of the world,—made me, after a space, weary even of the slight shackles imposed upon me by the duties of my office; and they were next to nominal. My brother’s destiny—ah! *that* seemed to present everything that heart could desire, or imagination paint, of bliss on earth. Unbounded means, a robust frame, a sensitive nature,—without which last no man ever feels the true ecstasy of gladness thrill his system, however evenly the dull stream of contentment may flow in his veins, and which, to the fortunate possessor, clothes the world with the bright and ever-varying hues of romance,—all these were his, all these I could appreciate to the full, but, wanting the first, found, or imagined I found, the rest useless.

“One fault—and here I claim your assent—my brother had in his disposition or taste. This was a marked preference for the society of foreigners to that of his own countrymen. I know not whether he considered the Saxon temperament too cold, too cautious, too little congenial to his own impulsive character, but certainly he shunned habitually those circles in which the higher classes of the

English chiefly moved. The very assiduous court paid him by these on all occasions seemed to repel him. Who or what exactly his chosen associates were I did not know at the time ; but a light dawned upon that, revealing other matters, at a subsequent period. To one of the most important of these connexions formed by him I shall at once advert, without thinking it necessary to specify the precise manner in which I became possessed of the knowledge.

“Though much about Florence, and other parts of Italy at this time, Charles used to ramble, after his own eccentric fashion, to various parts of the seaboard of Europe—even further, I believe. However, of all these, I discovered that the Grecian Archipelago seemed to possess for him the greatest charms, and in time became his favourite haunt. I fancied the pleasures of yachting formed the sole inducement to linger in that quarter; but in the course of the few years, on the events of which I am lightly touching, I became aware of far more than I had ever dreamed of in connexion with the subject.

“It appears that, in his wild way, he had become intimately associated with a set of men, whose character and occupation would have repelled most people, but formed a dangerous fascination for one of my brother's temperament, for he was brave to a pitch of insensibility, and romantic to—to—I can only describe it as verging on insanity, according to the ideas of common men. The men I speak of were a horde of lawless adventurers, half-cultivators of the soil, half-pirates, who haunted the picturesque coasts of these rocky islands. With one of them, a remarkable per-

sonage in his way, Charles formed most peculiar relations. This individual was one, by all accounts, of superior intellect and acquirements, who had been driven by persecution on one pretext or another from his home—he was a Greek, and descended from an ancient line of nobles—till he had fled for refuge, with his family, to one of these small islands, there living as best he might, setting his country's laws, such as they were, at defiance, and letting slip no opportunity of retribution for the injustice he had received at the hands of the so-called government.

“ His family consisted of two daughters—one married to an adventurer like himself, sharing his perils and his home, the other a young girl of about sixteen or seventeen. Charles was not a mawkishly susceptible man, far from it, but, as I have said, he was romantic and impatient of conventionality, and of English conventionality most of all. I presume he fell in love with the girl, who, I am told, was both beautiful and of a gentle, timid disposition—very unlike those around her, but all the more likely to attract Charles, who was never so happy as in affording protection to a feebler nature than his own. I know he married her; all this was to have been kept secret even from me, with whom he had few concealments, but I—I was interested enough in his movements—not for good—to establish an *espionnage* upon him which he little suspected—I need not describe how—and I learned thus much of what he thought locked up in the recesses of his own bosom.

“ The girl died early—almost within the twelvemonth after the marriage took place. Whether there was any



issue, I never could with certainty learn—it is unlikely—should not you say so?—for my brother never, at any time, or in any way, alluded to the existence of such a being. No—I was—might I not say *I am*—justified in believing that no child existed; or at all events, long survived its birth?

“It was years after all this took place, before I drew from Charles the acknowledgment of his marriage. He had sold off his yacht, or disposed of it in some other way, and for a long period, I neither heard from nor saw him. I knew, however, that he was taking a part in various national struggles and *émeutes*, all of which knowledge fostered, by the vile hope to which it gave food, the busy devil who now worked incessantly in my brain.

“In the meantime, I came home invalided—weakened in health, restless and fevered in mind and imagination. Then, Tom, we met—then took place my first meeting with her whom I should have guarded as a priceless treasure from the very touch of evil, but whom, instead, I am dragging with me to an untimely grave. Thus far; but, O Thomas Clinton, no further—our courses separate when this mortal vesture fades. For, can it be conceived that, in the realms of everlasting light, her blessed essence could walk hand in hand with the dark spirit that overshadowed her existence here? Enough of this—bear with me—I must pause—I have miscalculated my strength in venturing on this topic—

“To proceed—I shall henceforth confine myself to a bare narrative of facts, avoiding, as far as I can, digressions

which must be tedious to you, and are torture to myself. The nature of my brother's career during the few following years, I have generally sketched; as I have said, it was one calculated to feed in my mind the unnatural hope that its sudden termination at any moment might place me in the position he filled, as the titled and wealthy owner of Maudesley Hall,—a position—as I speciously argued with my seldom-intruding better self—of which he neither knew the value, nor fulfilled the obligations. If one of these was the providing nobly for a thankless brother, let me not hide from *you* at least a fact the world never learned from the donor. My own private fortune was small, consisting chiefly of the proceeds derived from a small property which had been my mother's—it had not been in my father's power to burden his estate with a provision for his younger son, had he wished to do so—though I may remark, the entail ends in myself—and Lucy's parent, living as he did chiefly on a retiring allowance from the East India Company, had little to leave—not more than sufficient to secure a few hundreds per annum. Therefore the luxuries—necessaries I chose to consider them—with which I strove to supply the place of England's health-giving breezes to her who was indeed all in all to me, had been beyond my reach but for my brother's benevolence.

“As you may remember, soon after my marriage, I was again removed to a higher grade in another embassy—that at Constantinople. Here our struggles against the destroying influence of the climate were so far vain that two boys who were successively born to us sunk under its

effects before they had learned to lisp our names. I need not pause to describe our grief. Then my Geraldine was born, and Heaven in mercy gifted her with a more elastic frame than the others—she was spared to us. But still she was far from robust, and Lucy's health began to shew symptoms of a decay which might become confirmed, failing active measures for arresting the progress of the evil. It was evident, in short, that the bracing climate of home was necessary, if indeed it was not too late, for the recovery of the mother and the safe rearing of the child.

“My arrangements were soon made for a return to England on lengthened leave of absence, and Charles, from whom I had received letters of deep sympathy at the time of our babies' being taken from us, at this juncture again wrote, dating his letter from Vienna, and inquiring into my welfare, and the nature of my plans. During all these years, after the bare revelation had been made, no word had passed my brother's lips, no expression emanated from his pen regarding his unhappy union or its results. Some attempts on my part to induce a thorough confidence on *his*, had been repelled firmly—sternly, for *him*, and I, not unwillingly, consented to look upon the matter as one to be forgotten for ever.

“We now arranged to proceed home together, the question being, whether he should join us at some point on our route, or we proceed to Vienna with the view of travelling home overland. Charles, for a reason of which I was not aware at the time—most lamentably for himself—strongly advocated the former plan, and as a sea voyage

was thought rather advisable than otherwise for Lucy and the child, we assented, and were to have met at Gallipoli, whither it was our intention to proceed by land. It was early summer, the heats not having yet set in, and many things combined to make a journey to that place pleasant and cheering. Therefore servants were sent on in advance to make the necessary preparations for our arrival—no superfluous caution, as you are aware, who know the country, and its availabilities for the comfort of invalid tourists. A steamer, leaving Constantinople about a fortnight afterwards, was to touch at Gallipoli, taking our whole party forward as far as Malta, the remainder of the voyage to be completed as circumstances might determine."

Here Sir Ralph Maudesley's accents began to falter, and his breath to come thick and gaspingly, rendering recourse to the port decanter absolutely necessary, and he swallowed more than one bumper before he found himself in a fit state to go on.

"Lucy seemed to revive from the very day on which she left Constantinople; whether it was the healthy excitement of the journey, the new scenes through which we passed—whether joy at the prospect of revisiting her loved home, I know not. One thought only dashed her bright anticipations with sadness—our little babies—had it been their lot to see the light elsewhere, might they not have been preserved to us? But there are few indeed in this world, who may not cast a gloom over otherwise happy hours, if they allow such repinings to have a place in their

breasts. And I—instead of rejoicing in the prospect of improvement held out for Lucy's health in her buoyant spirits and brightened eye; instead of thanking the Giver of all mercies, and thus closing the portals of my heart to the tempter—I allowed him to lay hold of these very benefits and wrest them to his purposes.

“Oh that my brother's lot were mine! that I, who sought a mere temporary relief in the joys of home, were now proceeding to the halls of my ancestors, no more to quit them! While he, careless of the mighty gift vouchsafed him in his birthright, contemplated but a brief stay there, relinquishing, of free unfettered choice, those unalloyed delights, and hurrying back to scenes which were fraught with weariness at the best to me, with death, perhaps, to those who were dearer to me than life itself!

“About a week was spent on the journey, the accommodation afforded by the different small towns at which we halted being often of the roughest description; but, thanks to Charles, I had ample means of providing and carrying with me such comforts as were necessary for my invalids. They positively enjoyed the scrambling way in which we lived for those few days. At Gallipoli we had apartments spacious enough, though almost wholly unfurnished, in the only large hotel, or caravansary, of the place. Here, for a day or two, we fixed ourselves, indulging in repose from the fatigues of the journey, and amusing our leisure with short rambles in the vicinity.

“One evening, on my return from one of these, I was informed by one of my domestics, a Greek, whom, at his

request, I had agreed to take with me as far as Malta, that a stranger had been inquiring for me at the hotel, and was very urgent to see me. This was a Turkish police official—a kavashli, Dimitri said,—a renegade Frank, of which there are specimens to be found in most countries of the civilised world; and seldom of the most reputable class. However, as we conversed, the man in question returned; and as I was curious to know what he could have to say, I desired that he should be shewn at once into my presence. The fact is, I was fully prepared for some bungling attempt at imposition, with which sort of thing I knew well how to deal. You will judge how mistaken I was. This individual obtained then, and has since exercised so powerful an influence over my life, that I cannot proceed without shortly describing him as he stood before me.

“He was dressed, according to his ostensible calling, as a sort of police officer of the Turkish government, half civilian, half soldier—more of the latter in his mien and bearing, at all events, if not in his garments. But his features were decidedly those of a native of western Europe, and his frame one of the most strikingly powerful I ever beheld. Judge, Thomas Clinton, what must have been my feelings, when—the devil being, I repeat to you, seldom long or far absent from my bosom—this man proceeded hurriedly to acquaint me that through means at his disposal, and in the way of his avocation, it had come to his knowledge that there was a plot fast ripening to fruition, hatched by a party of scoundrels—brigands—who had become aware of my brother’s presence in the country,

and that he was travelling nearly alone, and in possession of a considerable sum in gold—to seize and plunder, and, as a matter of course, to take the life of the incautious traveller. The scene of the murderous drama thus chalked out was a small village on the west coast, some thirty miles distant, where, to my astonishment, I now learned he had halted; and had been, for some reason of his own, stationary for nearly a week past.

“A mist came over my eyes as I listened to this man! He was an Englishman, and, he affirmed, no renegade; and his statement had the earnestness and circumstantiality of truth.

“‘It might appear to me strange,’ he said, noting and mistaking the cause of my hesitation, ‘that he, a kavashli, should be powerless to stop the further progress of this villainy, by reporting to the proper official quarter; but if so, I little knew the Turks,’ he said. No matter now for his explanation; without a residence in that strange country, and the study of its ways, you would not credit that which he propounded as a common fact. I knew the probability of the case being as he stated it, and made no remark on that part of the affair. He went on. There was one way in which my brother could be saved, and but one. Leaving my family where they were, for the few days, or even hours, necessary for our purpose, I must arm myself and such of my domestics as could be spared—he would guide me—and we must, without a moment’s delay, be on the road to ———, where my brother slumbered, as it were, on the brink of a volcano.

"The devil entered my heart and reigned there absolute. My plan was formed in less time than it takes to speak the words—in half the time you will require for realising the fact that such things can be! The mist passed at once from my brain, and I stood before the man, calm, resolute—a hardened villain. I treated his statement with scornful disbelief—would have offered *him* insult, but for something in his eye as he watched me, which told me that—that—in short, I dared not. Oh! Tom Clinton, weak and vacillating as I had been under the assaults of sin, I had never been a *coward* till that moment; then I became one, and an abject coward I have remained up to this day.

"The kavashli was slow to believe that I was in very earnest; many minutes were passed in vehement, stern asseveration and appeal on his part,—in cool, unwavering, affected irony on mine, (though an almost imperceptible tremor pervaded every limb, and, as he failed not scornfully to remark, the hue of death was on my forehead,) but I was firm. At length he departed, openly branding me with the ignominy I deserved, and announcing his determination, since I was dead to all natural feeling—such were his words—to proceed alone—(*alone*—I marked that) to save the noble Englishman who was thus left to destruction by his own flesh and blood.

"He had not been gone three minutes, when I summoned my Greek servant, Dimitri, to my presence. He looked at me in some surprise, ignorant as he was of the cause of my agitation, but ere I had spoken three sentences, I found him, as I had expected, only too well fitted for the black



deed I meditated. He was a veritable type of his countrymen, that man, and though his qualities as a handy, active servant had recommended him to me for the journey, I knew him to be subtle, greedy, and treacherous as a quicksand. He scarcely changed countenance, as I spoke; asked few questions, and those only in reference to the amount I was willing to pay for this special service. 'The signor's will was law to him,' enforced by the arguments which accompanied its expression—the only ones whose power he recognised on earth—earth's dross—his deity and *mine!*

"That evening, three armed desperadoes, Dimitri himself being one, heedless of law, reckless of blood, pursued the unsuspecting kavashli on his brave errand. He had started on horseback, heavily armed, in less than an hour after quitting my presence.

"As it happened, my plans were nearly rendered futile, but the superior, whose behests I was obeying for the time, bestowed on me in part his favour and success. It appeared, the two ruffians, along with Dimitri, came up with the kavashli, and endeavoured, according to my commands, to take him for a brief space prisoner, and to delay him on his journey.

"I am laying bare before you the inmost recesses of my heart, Thomas Clinton, and you may believe me when I say that my injunctions went to this extent, no further. I would not have a second life upon my soul! However, this part of my project failed. The man I talk of (as I said before, he was an Englishman; his name was 'Thorn-

field,') was possessed of Herculean strength, and unusual skill in the management of his weapons. In about as much time as it takes to narrate it, I believe, one of his assailants was killed dead—it was Dimitri—the other two, one of whom was badly hurt, fled. Raising the country people, however, they contrived, by some false tale of outrage, to have Thornfield seized, and though he was at once set free on being recognised by the authorities, the delay was sufficient. He arrived at —— only to see my brother—my kind, noble Charles—a mutilated corpse! All this was afterwards related to me by Thornfield, at which time he also alluded, more in irony than anger, to the attempt made by my orders on his person. 'Three Greeks,' said he, and he laughed as he spoke, 'only three—to trap Basil Thornfield!'

"But I am anticipating, though slightly, the direct course of my story. And I have some difficulty in proceeding here, for—for—I am going to claim your belief in what I have endeavoured, though in vain, to urge to myself as a sort of feeble palliative to my guilt.

"In the fearful mental struggle which ensued upon the departure of Dimitri on his mission—after hours of agony which, in seclusion, on some vague pretext, I sought to conceal from my wife and child, my still lingering good angel achieved a brief victory. He never leaves us altogether, Clinton, however thrust to the background by the admission of an adverse influence—no—mournfully there he hovers, now nearer, now further; but never hopelessly

beyond recall by prayer, while the lamp of life burns! It may be that the arch-enemy, having gained his purpose, now ceased in mockery, or, for a space to refill his chalice with deadlier venom, from a labour which success had rendered superfluous.

"I started as from a hideous dream. The incarnate presence of the fiend seemed, like some foul nightmare, to take flight, and release my torpid faculties. I sought my wife and child—talked to them in a manner which must have been incoherent; but they (that is, Lucy) made no attempt to oppose the purpose I announced, of going at once in quest of my brother. For I told them some small part of what I have just related. 'I was alarmed for his safety,' I said; 'I could not rest while that remained doubtful; no, go I must, and at once. Dimitri had gone forward on a similar mission—but I—I could not trust him—I must go in person.'

"To such effect were the confused sentences with which I accounted for my sudden resolve. Lucy was, naturally enough, much alarmed, but—you know her, Tom Clinton, and will credit the unselfish firmness with which she then, as ever, repressed her own feelings, in witnessing the pain of mine. Armed, therefore, and attended by two soldiers, whose assistance I found it easy to secure by permitting them to name their own terms, (Thornfield, by the way, had suggested this as an alternative to my personal efforts, but I had turned a deaf ear to this plan also,) and, placing my family under the protection, similarly purchased, of the

local authorities, I was on the road to —, travelling with what speed men and horses could accomplish, within six hours after my interview with the kavashli.

“I cannot tell you how we surmounted the journey. I have a dim recollection of a rugged pathway—I think the moon was nearly at the full—a break-down of one of our animals; that and the rider left behind in our frantic onward course. The day had fairly dawned when, drooping with exhaustion over my horse’s mane, but still upheld by the fever which coursed through my veins, I rode at such pace as I could urge from the jaded animal beneath me, into the cluster of hovels which formed the village of —.

“I had not far to search for him I sought. At the entrance of a building somewhat larger than the rest, and apparently the residence of the chief inhabitant, stood the man whom I had endeavoured to stay on the very errand which brought me. I saw astonishment depicted on his features—I saw him hastily turn as if to shun me—when nature, taxed beyond her powers, gave way, and I fell insensible in the midst of a group of villagers who had gathered silently round.

“When I recovered, Thornfield sat by the couch or litter on which I lay. Let me do this man justice. Rugged in speech and bearing, reckless in mode of life—he yet appeared in many ways to hold nature’s patent of nobility. He said little at the moment, but busied himself in restoring me to the full use of my wandering faculties. Then he informed me that the roof beneath which I lay overshadowed my brother’s corpse.

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"Tom Clinton, the intelligence thus communicated nearly plunged me once more into unconsciousness. By a violent effort, during which my companion preserved a grave and watchful silence, I managed to regain some measure of composure. I even allowed the tempter to approach once more, with falsely-soothing palm, the fevered surface of my mind. He was not slow to supply me with specious pretences to myself. After all, had I not striven to atone, as far as in me lay, for the bad impulse of an unguarded moment? I was but human—weak, liable to temptation. I had laboured truthfully to obviate the consequence of my error, and—*I was Sir Ralph Maudesley of Maudesley Hall!*

"Clinton, I had the hardihood to ask to be conducted to my brother's bier. Thornfield, at once rising, as though he had expected the demand, led the way. I followed, staggering as I went, to the darkened chamber where it stood. Ay, there—there—I could have fancied as I approached new blots of gore started to the surface of the blood-stained linen cloth in which the remains were shrouded—there lay the mutilated frame which but last morning clothed the noblest spirit that ever fled untimely to its Creator.

"You never saw my brother. I can only say of him, that, looking on his portrait and on mine, you might have justly paraphrased the expressions of Hamlet. The face, rigid in death, and partly swathed in linen, for a fearful gash traversed its lineaments from forehead to chin, was barely recognisable. There, however, were the finely-

chiseled features, looking sharper than was natural to life; the long silken dark moustache which Charles always wore; and on one finger was a trinket, which had apparently escaped the assassin's eye, or been deemed too valueless for removal—a plain gold signet-ring, bearing the crest and motto of our family. As I gazed, Thornfield silently, and seemingly without difficulty, drew this from the scarcely yet stiffened finger, and placed it in my hand. I started. It was as though I received the insignia of my new position, and I looked for a moment searchingly at the features of him who gave it. I could not be certain—I *think* there was a sneer on his countenance, but he said nothing, and I did not of course venture to make any remark. This done, without daring to impress a kiss upon the pale brow of the corpse, I retired from the chamber of death.

“I now despatched a messenger, the soldier who had accompanied me, to my family with the news, sincerely mourned by them, of what had occurred. At some little distance from the village was a small Greek church, having attached to it a piece of consecrated ground. Here my brother was buried, for the agony of bearing with me the murdered corpse was more than I could endure, even had it been practicable, with the appliances at hand. Besides, I now learned, to my no small surprise, that the owner of the tenement where I found my brother's remains was no other than the husband—I have before alluded to him, I think—of his late wife's sister. Thus was the lingering of poor Charles in that neighbourhood accounted for.

"He had been attacked by the assassins, five or six in number, they told me, in a lonely spot some miles off, and after leaving more than one of his assailants dead or disabled on the ground,—for Charles was a most accomplished swordsman,—had himself fallen, cleft by a scimitar stroke from the forehead to the chin. His sole domestic, a Hungarian, also remained dead by his side. My brother's stock of money, which, after his usual reckless fashion, he carried about his person, was gone. I cared not, as you may suppose, to investigate curiously the truth or falsehood of this statement. I made hasty arrangements for the erection of a tablet to his memory. This his brother-in-law (I saw this man, as well as others, pass before me as in a dream) undertook to see performed. Strange to say, he was most unwilling to receive money for the purpose; but I insisted upon leaving a considerable sum to be so applied. Then, accompanied by Basil Thornfield, I returned to Gallipoli in a state of mind which I do not love to recall to memory; nor could I analyse it for the information of another if I would.

"Now it was I learned from my companion that my late servant's death had not been so instantaneous, but that he had found time to reveal the author of the plot in which he had acted. But my dismay at the announcement of this fact, and my protestations of innocence as regarded any design against his life, were cut short by the kavashli's derisive laughter. 'It signified little,' he said, 'what was my intent. Dimitri had certainly appeared to consider a yataghan the surest method of delaying his progress, but

the plottings of one who knew him so little as to send three Greeks against him could not in any case matter to him a pin's head.' I was lavish in my promises of atonement and reward. He heard me in silence for a time, and with a look, I scarcely know whether to call it irony or amusement, which nearly drove me mad, for he wore it nearly at all times, and I could not fathom its meaning. At last, assuming a look of something like gravity, he said that, 'unwilling as he was to enter into terms with one like myself, (then, as now, he never spared me,) he could not afford to break from under his feet a round upon the ladder of preferment in life. He should consider, and let me know at what price his silence might be bought.'

"Stunned as I had been by the discovery thus made, I was only too glad to find him prepared to meet the subject in this way, for his previous demeanour had led me to expect something different. But what, after all, was the transaction to him? He could not mend the matter by denouncing me; he shewed wisdom, therefore, in seeking his account in that guilt, the aim whereof he had striven to avert. Still he was, and is, a paradox to me, that man, in his alternate warring elements of good and evil.

"We had a long conference together now before I left Gallipoli. I shall come by and by to the compact I made with Thornfield, who intimated his intention to relinquish his post in the Turkish service, and seek or push his fortune elsewhere, it being no longer necessary for him—



you can guess why—to make a slave of himself for actual bread.

"I sailed with my family three days afterwards for England, *viâ* Malta, as I had proposed. I need not enlarge upon the shock those events brought with them to poor Lucy; it nearly occasioned an illness which might have detained us for weeks. It was worth making an effort for, however; and she was not one to refuse the exertion, when I wished, and she possessed the bare power to make it.

"I shall pass over the details of our uneventful voyage home. On my first return to England, my task in blinding the eyes of the world was not difficult. The haggard brow, the sunken cheek, the fevered, hollow eye, were all set down to legitimate and natural, though perhaps overstrained grief, for the loss of that brother whom I had consigned to death. Besides, I was owner of one of the finest estates in Britain, my hospitality was in those days unbounded, and society is slow to pry into the secrets of the *vrai Amphytrion*. So at least I found it, as long as I mixed unreservedly, giving and accepting hospitality, among the pleasure-seekers of the world. Woe's me! *my* search was for peace, and to that I carried a fatally antagonistic element deep in my own bosom!

"This state of things was not destined to last. A circumstance now took place, which, added to others following it, threw me into a state of nervous prostration, and has darkened my existence with its horrors ever since.

"By my agreement with Thornfield, he was to receive a

certain sum, payable at such intervals, and through such agency as he might find it convenient to name. At first he had obstinately declined intrusting the matter to any third person whatever. He seemed amused at the idea,—‘Basil Thornfield’s agent! wonders would never cease, but that marvel should never be added to the catalogue, if he could help it. No; right or wrong, he hated a lawyer next to a parson, and would have nothing to do with either, while head and hands remained to him to help himself.’ He saw cause, however, subsequently, to alter this determination, for, at his own suggestion, the matter has latterly been left in the hands of my lawyers, Wright and Thoroughpace. I need not say what colouring I gave the affair to them—I do not think Wright believed it, but distrusting the whole world myself, I have become accustomed to distrust in others, and it scarcely adds to my discomfort.

“About three years passed before Thornfield first came to receive his—subsidy, or whatever it may be called—bribe, if you like. I will not attempt to describe the shock I sustained then from the new and unexpected intelligence he brought with him; it hurled me, as it were, from the precarious footing I was endeavouring to establish amid the shifting sands of false tranquillity. I had by that time half drugged my memory by various means. I had stifled, if not satisfied my conscience, and was even almost happy at times in viewing the gradual return of Lucy to something like her former self, and in thinking of the brilliant future which dawned upon our child. In

fact the deepest shade of regret which crossed our felicity was the memory of the sons we had lost. Let me, then, describe, as shortly as I can, the circumstances under which that, and nearly every other sensation of hope or sorrow, was whelmed in one black vortex of despair!

“Thornfield’s manner, during the first part of our interview, struck me as very peculiar. He received with *non-chalance* the large amount which I held ready for his acceptance, and which, according to a request made by him in writing some days previously, was in the shape of letters of credit on a house in Marseilles. He hesitated, surveyed me doubtfully, and seemed pondering how to introduce a subject which faltered on his tongue. It struck me that avarice had found its way into that rough breast, and that he debated in what terms to couch a further demand. I never was more mistaken. In answer to a few searching words on my part, he replied that ‘the amount was according to compact, and that was enough, no matter whether too much or too little, but that—indeed, so far from wishing or intending to suggest its increase, he had to tell me that it rested with myself, whether this, the first payment, should also be the last.’

“I was mute with bewilderment, and he proceeded, having now apparently made up his mind as to the manner of expressing his meaning.

“‘I was aware,’ he began ‘that my brother had married some years before his death.’

“I signified acquiescence, having, indeed, acknowledged

my being aware of that fact on a previous occasion. Thornfield proceeded :—

“‘Your brother was a man of singular reticence! Did he never reveal any of the facts connected with that union?’

“‘Facts!’—a sort of nervousness beset me, though I had not the most vague perception of his drift, which impeded my utterance. ‘None. What facts could exist connected with a union so shortlived?’

“‘Was the marriage childless?’

“‘I started as if stung by some venomous thing. ‘Childless! it was so, else how should I stand there, owner of my brother’s inheritance?’

“‘He smiled grimly, and nodded with a complacency real or assumed.

“‘So be it; if such be your feelings, my task is ended ere well begun—and my income gone!’

“‘This interview took place here—within these walls. I sunk breathless, speechless with vague terror, on a couch before him.

“‘‘The natural conclusion for you to arrive at,’ continued he, ‘must, I own, have been as you state it; *but you are mistaken—a child was born—a son!*’

“‘I forget what I did—I have an indistinct remembrance of uttering wild expressions of rage, and of laying hands madly on the man before me. He disengaged my fingers as though I had been an infant, and replaced me, helpless, on the seat from which I had risen.

“‘Not being overwhelmed with affairs of my own,’

continued he calmly, 'times being slack, I have employed myself, since we last met, in investigating certain of the particulars connected with—a late event; among others, I gleaned several from the Greek trader, as he calls himself, who married the sister of your late brother's wife. Not being aware of his position and importance in his native country, or believing him to be much more than an adventurer like themselves, the girl's relations made no inquiry after her dead husband's effects. In fact, they were much attached to the only tangible legacy he bequeathed, and dreaded its being lost to them—his infant son.'

"'False! false!' I gasped.

"'His infant son—a fine boy—born in lawful wedlock, (I can find the Greek priest who performed the ceremony, and it was afterwards ratified, or whatever you call it, by an English parson from Cephalonia,)—a fine boy, I say, and heir, by undeniable birthright to Maudesley Hall!'

"'It is a vile invention—you—they—cannot prove it.'

"'Will you put us to the attempt? Come, Sir Ralph Maudesley, you are going too fast. I have not said that I shall play the paladin here—redresser of wrongs—I am too poor'——

"'Spare me this lie, and I will double'——

"'Stuff! Listen to me—I tell you, a bargain is a bargain, and so far so well. But I have a conscience, strange as it may appear to you; besides, I knew something of Sir Charles—as fine a fellow, and as brave as ever broke bread, and I'd risk something to do justice to his heir.

It is but a risk, for doubtless the lad's guardians would consider my services.'

"I am quoting, as far as I can remember them, Thornfield's very words. I was silent, not, indeed, as yet apprehending the exact tendency of his remarks. He went on, after a pause, during which he surveyed me inquiringly :—

"'Well! shall we give the boy a chance—mind, I ask nothing more—of proving his right to the inheritance?'

"'No—no—that is, why open up a half-closed wound to no purpose—draw the world's attention to so wild a fiction?'

"'The wound, as you call it, cannot be healthily closing under such surgery as you have employed. Better touch it with the good wholesome caustic of restitution. You shake your head and close your eyes tight. I understand, Sir Ralph Maudesley; but you cannot shut out the truth. Listen to it. Knowing that which now you do know, justice to the child is the sole atonement you can offer to the wronged father!'

"I cannot further pursue in detail the conversation as it proceeded. My strength, unnaturally taxed, is waning to a close. In brief, this man proposed cheerfully to relinquish the large amount now paid for his silence, in consideration, not of my resigning rank and wealth to the child, whose existence he affirmed, but of my giving sanction to a full inquiry, as to the truth or falsehood of the tale he told. He, however, with some inadvertence, acknowledged that the proofs he held, though morally undeniable, and such

as must convince myself,—he staked his honour upon that,—might probably not be of a nature to carry conviction into a court of law. I revived at this admission; I calmed myself; I was obdurate. I would neither listen to the tale nor sanction its investigation. In fine, we parted, on the understanding that my willing, free consent alone, should prompt a renewal of those measures of inquiry which he professed to have begun.

“But peace of mind, repose of conscience, tranquillity, where were they now? From that hour dates the commencement of the miserable treble penance, which guilt, and unavailing remorse combine to inflict on one who shrinks from a retribution within his power. For though this man, Thornfield, has since repeatedly urged upon me compliance with his request, assuring me,—and the last time but the other day,—that measures of redress are still as open to me as ever, I cannot force myself to stand the ordeal, or look boldly on the consequences. For if this wild story should be true, what then would become of my wife and child? Counsel me, Thomas Clinton; I have laid before you everything. What am I to do?”

Clinton was lying back in his arm-chair, his chin resting upon one hand, the elbow being supported by the other arm, which crossed his breast. His brow had been gathered during the latter part of Sir Ralph's story into its deepest frown, and he had been perfectly silent, with the exception of an occasional involuntary groan. He now started into a sitting posture, as though waking suddenly from a disturbed dream.

"What are you to do? Good heaven! Ralph Maudesley, how is it that you have remained so long in doubt? Are there two courses for a *man* to hesitate about, where his Maker points one way and his tempter the other?"

"My wife and child"—began the wretched baronet.

"Your wife and child! Are you consulting their happiness in the path you have chalked out for them? Why, man, you are the upas-tree that poisons those helpless things, unlucky as they are to have taken root beneath your shade! Your wife!—you will not long be encumbered with her at this rate; and your child—a pretty fate you are half ready to consign her to. Ah, by the way, Mr St Alban—you have not explained his share in this drama."

"It is soon done. After my first interview with Thornfield, I perceived, or fancied I perceived, a change in the demeanour of my neighbours towards me. Much of this, I now believe, was attributable to my own morbid fancy; but still there may have been much observable in my own manner to excite surprise, if not to repel. Then St Alban came, and the bland courtesy with which he always met me in our intercourse, which at first was slight enough, paved the way to greater intimacy. I was angry too with my other associates on account of their imaginary coldness, and thought to revenge myself, or at all events assert my dignity, by taking up this man, who was received by them in general with considerable reserve. So matters went on for some time, and the seeming gratitude with which he met my endeavours to place him on a better footing in the



county than he then occupied, blinded, and perhaps flattered me. Why spin out these details? In a moment of utter infatuation, I took this man into my confidence—told him my story nearly as I have told it to you”——

“The devil!” Tom Clinton could not help interjecting.

“With the exception of Thornfield’s assertion regarding my brother’s heir.”

“Oh! you kept that back—so far well.”

“But he knows enough to confer upon him a terrible power, and he has the will to use it unsparingly. His demeanour changed from the very day on which he became possessed of these facts. You know what shape his persecution assumes.”

“Good! From that day, as you say, he became a persecutor. From this hour he is powerless. I shall seek Thornfield.”

“Good heavens! stay—we must consult.”

“Stay—consult! Look here, Maudesley, there is but one path you can follow in honour. You have taken me into your counsels, and I tell you candidly you shall follow no other. Not a word—or—I’ll tell you what, Ralph, this man holds revelation over you as a threat in case you refuse consent to his iniquitous proposals; I, on the other hand,—if you will not do what is right and just—d——n me if—if—I don’t”——

“Do you seriously tell me, Tom Clinton, that *you* would betray a trust confided to you?”

“Well—no—no—I could not perhaps exactly do that; but still I am determined that for the sake of that very

wife and child, whose possibly altered destiny you deplore, —for their sakes, I say, you shall do what is right here.”

“If I thought I could appease my brother’s spirit”——

“Appease your grandmother—nonsense!—I beg pardon, —but seek forgiveness from your Maker, Maudesley, and let your brother’s spirit rest. You will give me a message to Thornfield.”

“Who can tell where to find him?”

“You can—if not, I undertake to do it. Stay, will not a letter bring him?”

“I am not deceiving you, Clinton—I am not, indeed —a letter might not reach him for weeks; and I am given but a month to reply to that man’s demands!”

“Enough! I go to-morrow morning in search of Basil Thornfield. Before the month is out, you shall see us here before you; but be prepared then—no hesitation—no shuffling. Ah! Ralph, Ralph! if you had but trusted me sooner, what years of misery I might have been able to spare you and yours!”

“You avoided this place—never would come to us—why?”

“Why? Oh! I don’t know—a restless old bachelor.” Tom Clinton sighed, and flushed over his deep-lined brow, as he stretched out his hand for the water-decanter. “Better late than never, at all events; your good angel is coming near to you again, Ralph—eh! man—do you not hear the fluttering of his wings?”

“You talk in jest, Clinton; but you would scarce believe me if I were to tell you what a load seems to have

fallen from my breast! And you think—you really think—I have no other course?"

"None—emphatically, none."

"Grant this tale of 'Thornfield's to be true; who but myself would be the child's natural guardian? He must be younger than Geraldine."

"All that can be settled afterwards; but you must give me some sort of credentials to Thornfield."

"Yes, yes, my dear Clinton. As for the back rents"—

"D——n the back rents; think of the rent in your honour, Maudesley; the money matters will be all right enough. Shall I give a verbal message, then, or will you write?"

"Anything you like. It may be a fiction of Thornfield's to try me, after all!"

"Of course," said Clinton, who thought it politic to humour this notion at all events. "Will you write now? Pen and ink are in the library—come"—

"No; I must rest. I shall take a sedative and go to bed. But do not fear me, Tom, I will not fail you; upon my honour, if you will accept such guarantee."

"I will. Why not? it is getting brighter now each hour that passes, while you hold to your righteous purpose. Good night! remember, I must be afoot early—shall be on board the Southampton packet in three days' time. I shall not see Lucy—Geraldine, perhaps, just to say good-bye; but I shall tell her nothing you could wish unsaid—in a general way, perhaps, I may hint that there are brighter days in store for all of you. Good night!"

repeated Tom, as the baronet slowly and feebly retired,—then, as soon as he was out of hearing, he added, “for a miserable, soulless, heartless, wreck of humanity! O Lucy Milward, Lucy Milward! I would have given you at least a heart that would have broken before this load should have been laid on yours. And to stoop to actual crime; is *this* man really and truly guilty of his brother’s blood? Zounds, I do not like to think over it too much. He repented; tried to avert the consequences; but my brain is in a whirl, when I try to analyse the matter, for of a truth it is beyond the comprehension of—of—d——n me, it must be said—an honest man!” Thomas Clinton went to bed, after a solitary cup of coffee, and a short musing fit in the drawing-room, for Geraldine, finding that the gentlemen sat so late, had left an apologetic message, and retired to her mother’s apartment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FOLLOWING THE CLUE.

COLONEL THOMAS CLINTON, we repeat, went to bed, where, however, he did not go to sleep, but chose to lie awake pondering over the marvels to which he had been listening. It would be difficult to exaggerate, or even to describe the effect of such a narrative upon a mind constituted like his. If he had been like Ralph Maudesley, the younger brother of one possessed of rank and wealth, he would probably have been proud of the hereditary wearer of the family honours, and jealous of his not receiving the deferential notice due to his position; but it never would have occurred to him to covet his place; and had he died leaving him, Tom Clinton, a title and three thousand a year, he would, in singleness of heart, have mourned for him as sincerely as if his demise had only robbed him of an annuity. There was no double meaning in that man's words; no latent unhallowed emotion found a place in that honest breast wherein to flourish. Human he was to the heart's core, and full of man's weaknesses, like his fellows; but they were all amiable ones—of the earth—not earthy.

Tom says he heard every hour strike that night till morning. We doubt it; but be that as it may, he was up and dressed before a general rising of the lower household took place. Taking it for granted that he should find no one stirring, he proceeded down stairs to the drawing-room. As he passed the library door it opened, and Sir Ralph Maudesley stood before him with outstretched hand.

"You did not think to find me having stolen a march upon you," remarked the latter, with a smile which was ghastly enough. "Come in here; we can round off our business of last night without fear of interruption."

Clinton looked at his host as they sat opposite each other at the library table. He was certainly very pale, even for *him*, and there were dark rings round his eyes; but that was natural enough after the excitement he had so lately gone through; "not to mention," thought Thomas, "two-thirds at least of a bottle of old port, which was a tolerable allowance for an habitual water-drinker."

"You have got my credentials all ready, I see," quoth Tom, after a slight pause, glancing at a small sealed packet, which lay at the baronet's elbow.

"All that is necessary is here," said Sir Ralph, taking it in his hand, and sighing deeply as he did so; "this contains a token which was agreed upon between Thornfield and myself, as indicating my assent to his suggestions. I do not know exactly where he is, as I said last night; but if you will kindly take the trouble to call at Wright and Thoroughpace's chambers, and shew Mr Wright—only

Wright himself, remember—the outside of this packet, he will give you more precise directions.”

“Oh! I know; I—hem—hem—I will call there certainly,” said Tom, suddenly checking himself, as he reflected that it was unnecessary Sir Ralph should be made aware of his preparatory visit to the solicitor.

“And now the only feeling that remains is one of deep—alas! unavailing—regret, that this confidence was not sought and rendered years ago. No use mourning over it now—the way of human nature—we let ourselves go with the current, ever looking for a landing-place which does not exist, till we find ourselves within the sweep of the rapids; it is only a strong arm, like yours, which can save us then.”

“It is only an honest determination which can do it,” answered Clinton. “Stick to that, and, battered about as you may be, you will escape going over the falls. But, Maudesley, I hear the servants stirring; will you order me some breakfast and a dog-cart or something? I must be *en route* in an hour; express at 8-25, I think. What a grand interposition of Providence that Haverton should be a first-class station!”

“Everything will be seen to; I have given directions. Upon my soul, Clinton, I am as anxious now in this matter as you can be. Still, one thought weighs heavily upon me. Suppose this story to be true, and every restitution made—myself, my wife, and child, beggars.”

“Pshaw, Maudesley!”

“We might be. Remember the back reckonings!

However, I am purposely putting an extreme case; for in any event, still this St Alban has power to make my name a byword in men's mouths—still to continue his persecution of poor Geraldine, unless"—

"Pshaw, once again! A fico for his power and his persecution both! Why, man, my goddaughter in her smock would be a prize for a prince of the blood-royal—but not for Mr Geoffrey St Alban. Make your mind easy."

"I hope and trust it will be as you imagine; that being so, I can endure the rest. I have—hem—there is a small property which I had always intended to settle on Lucy; it was my mother's."

"My dear sir, that will be all satisfactorily arranged—never fear. But come; I hear the jingling of plates and tea-cups. Where shall I have my breakfast? Here? Good," continued Thomas, very impatient of the baronet's uneasy speculations for his future; but in high spirits, too, for the object of his mission was accomplished, all difficulties at an end, and only common, straightforward toil to come; and he thought little of that. Besides, the sun was now up, tipping the edges of the deep-green foliage with gold, and tracing out long shadows upon the dewy pasture beneath; the birds were tuning their sweet throats; and where there is nothing radically wrong in the mental structure, an early morning landscape beneath a cloudless summer sky must cheer and exhilarate those wise enough to think it worth looking for. They are not many. We are ourselves more theoretical than practical in this respect; but try it, dear readers, (you, at least, who number



fewer years than two score and ten,) and you will not give our assertion the lie. If you do, we place you under the ban of our reservation as above laid down.

"One minute to finish packing, and then to breakfast with what appetite I may," quoth Thomas, rubbing his hands, and expressing himself in Shakesperian phrase, not from any appositeness in the quotation, but in simple elasticity of spirit, as he left the library, and once more mounted the broad stair-case towards his own apartment.

At the entrance to the corridor a fairy figure barred his further progress.

"Geraldine! The top of this lovely morning to my lady fair!"

The girl silently placed her hand in his, and looked into his face with eyes brimful of eager inquiry. Her cheek flushed with hope at what she read there.

"All's well," he whispered in her ear. "Hush! I have got the clue. A strange one, but not difficult to follow. There has been something far from right; but we can labour now hopefully to retrieve all."

"Is there nothing we—mamma and I—can do to assist?"

"Hum—nothing, my dear, nothing; but keep your hearts as light as may be, and put faith in your knight-errant. He departs in an hour or so, with lance in rest, to seek the giant."

"Will you not tell us where you are going, god-father?"

"To the region proper of knight-errantry, goddaughter—the country of Cervantes—Spain, my dear; that is to say, the little nook of it where floats the British flag. You look mystified. I am bound for Gibraltar."

"For Gibraltar!"

"Even so. Ah, by the way, a certain phalanx keepeth ward in that stronghold, wherein a certain centurion—eh?—any message? No? Well, better not just yet, but the day will soon come, I trust, when all misunderstandings will be cleared away. So good-bye, Geraldine of my heart. Whisper to your mother just what I have whispered to you. Add thereto as few joint speculations of your own as possible, and ere a month be out look to see me again. Still," continued Clinton, discarding his lightness of tone, "you must both be prepared for strange, and not altogether what the world may consider pleasant changes."

And so the gentleman and young lady separated. The latter, speeding to her mother's side, retailed what Clinton had told her, much as he had spoken it; and the two, despite his parting recommendation, pondered deeply and anxiously over it together, arriving at the conclusion that there was something impending which threatened their worldly prosperity, but almost totally indifferent to the peril of that which had never given either of them one moment's happiness.

Little more passed at this time between Clinton and Sir Ralph Maudesley, the latter seeming anxious to get his guest fairly off, as though distrusting his own resolution in

the matter at issue. A very short space of time saw the colonel seated in the express train, on his way to the metropolis. There was one other passenger only in the carriage along with him, upon whom, before settling himself down à l'Anglais in his corner, with a local paper as a blind for his own private musings, Clinton felt impelled, after the first glance, to bestow a slightly-lengthened survey. This personage wore, although the day was warm even for the season, which was ripe summer, an upper garment of thick texture and foreign appearance, bearing some resemblance to a horse blanket of finer materials than ordinary, being, in fact, a Spanish *poncho*, and a travelling cap set rather jauntily on one side of a head covered with thick brown curls. A voluminous moustache of a lighter hue clothed his upper lip, a beard, of the cut designated in our day as a "Louis Napoleon," adorned his chin, and a pair of very piercing dark eyes glimmered, as it were, within the caverns formed by overhanging eyebrows, of a shade to match the latter-named hirsute appendages. Their owner did not seem inclined at once to permit his fellow-traveller to retire within himself. After giving vent to a most prodigious yawn, and bestowing a long gaze from the window upon the distant prospect of Maudesley Hall, which was there visible, he, without turning towards Clinton, commenced to talk.

"A fine place, and a magnificent country round," began he, in a decidedly foreign accent. "Can you tell me the name of that fine house, sare?"

"It is called Maudesley Hall," said Thomas Clinton,

in the tone which Britons much affect when disinclined to social intercourse."

"Maudesley Hall!—I recall to myself a circumstance connected with that name. Was there not a robbery attempted, and the robber shot, since a very few days?"

"The circumstance you allude to did take place as you state it," rejoined Tom, still from within his stronghold of the Haverton *Farmer's Oracle*.

"Ah! I thought so; he was admit into the house by a domestique"——

"Pardon me, there"——

"Yase—who, finding his plot defeat, silenced his associate with a *coup de pistolet*. Will the domestique be hang up, sare?"

"I assure you, sir, you have heard much that has no place in fact—that is not true."

"*Mais*, monsieur, my informant was live close to the house"——

"*Mais*, monsieur," reiterated Tom, very peevishly, "I myself had the honour of living *in* the house when the event took place."

"Ah—h—h! *ça*—then I was misinform. But the robber was shot—and by whom, sare?"

"By a person who also happened to be a guest at the hall."

"At the hall—what you call the servants' hall? A friend of the domestique's *appartement*?"

"Pshaw! no—a gentleman, who was staying in the house, like myself."

"Pardon!—but monsieur did not say 'a gentleman'—but he was not present, this gentleman, at the *procès*—what you call inquest—how then?"

"He was taken ill immediately after the affair, and had to return home."

"Where he rests, *malade*?"

"I believe he went almost immediately abroad," said Tom, endeavouring once more to close the conversation, for, truth to tell, he did not much admire what he saw of his companion; but that individual was by no means one of those who take a hint, no matter how broad, when otherwise inclined.

"I should like to see that gentleman," said he, soliloquising. "But, monsieur, in your country of a system so perfect, is it not imperative that he who fires the shot—*qui donne le coup*—in such a case as this, shall be examined?"

"Well, generally, sir, I believe it is; but if he happen to be too ill to appear, what the devil are you to do? and there was no mystery in this case."

"I am not quite sure of that,"—the words seemed to be spoken by some third person, they were so different in tone from those hitherto proceeding from the pertinacious individual opposite. Tom started, and looked uneasily at as much of the stranger's countenance as could now be seen above the folds of his *poncho*. The latter went on in his ordinary manner,—“The gentleman could not appear at the inquest—*bien*, I have been elsewhere so inform; but he could travel next day to Hull”——

"How the deuce do you know that?"

"Hem—I have converse with some people of his acquaintance, in talking of this affair, which interests me. This gentleman was an old man, I am inform—the nervous system not strong"——

"However that may be," quoth Tom Clinton, beguiled, in spite of himself, into continuing the conversation in a peevish sort of way, "it cannot have suffered from the lapse of time. He is certainly not beyond middle age—a strong, active man."

"Black hair, and sallow," suggested the stranger, as though thinking aloud.

"Brown hair—rather reddish, and usually rather florid," interposed Tom, with an impatient chuckle. "My good sir, your informants in this matter have not been worth much."

"I am fortunate in meeting a gentleman who is so courteous as to instruct," replied the other, blandly; "but I thought that with eyes what you call—hazel"——

"Mr St Alban has nothing of the sort; his are of a lightish gray, and there is almost what I should term a slight cast, by the by, in one of them; though there are worse-looking fellows too, as far as mere features go."

"Hah!" repeated the foreigner, and he spoke as if he meant it, "I shall like to see him. Remark, monsieur, I am a nervous man—I could not shoot a robber—*moi*,—I should lie on my back and kick and vociferate; and my *foiblesse* is curiosity to see those whose nerves are better."

"You will not have the pleasure of feasting your eyes now on this hero of your dreams."

"Ha, ha, good! The hero of my dreams—*ma foi!* so he is; but I may have that pleasure before I leave England, for I shall make a *séjour* of two, three week"—

"You will scarcely manage it at that rate. Mr St Alban does not return—at least here—for a month."

"A month—he will be absent from home a month; is monsieur sure?"

"Neither more nor less; I have good reason for being pretty sure; but, bless my soul, sir, you could not be more interested about this gentleman if *he* were a robber and you a thief-taker!

The foreign individual was quite convulsed with merriment. "What an idea for monsieur to express! But the *Anglais* were *ravissans* in the *naïve grotesquerie* of their remarks,"—it was quite too much for him apparently; and while Tom Clinton—irritated by a sort of vague, inexplicable feeling of being played with by the mysterious stranger—ensconced himself most determinedly behind his paper, the latter shrouded his features within the upper folds of his *poncho*, and to all appearance sought relief from his late over-dose of merriment in a gentle snooze.

In about the space of twenty minutes the train began to slacken its speed. "Ah, *pardi!*" exclaimed the foreigner, starting from his attitude of repose, "the train shall stop at this station, *n'est ce pas?* Bexford—yase—*permettez*, monsieur; I shall alight, as you English say, to stretch the legs—pardon—*bon jour!*" and, lugging after

him a small travelling-bag, which he produced from beneath the seat, he, with many apologies, squeezed past Clinton, and descended upon the platform. The latter, somewhat puzzled by his companion's thinking it necessary to carry his luggage with him in a mere descent for the above purpose, watched his movements, and saw him, after peering into several other carriages, get into a *coupé* somewhat further in advance.

"Good-bye for a bore," soliloquised the colonel; "but, confound you, if you objected to my company, you might at least have kept your jaw to yourself!"

When the train arrived at London, Tom felt somehow constrained to keep an eye on the carriage wherein his late companion had bestowed himself. He was too late, however. Somehow or other, in the bustle and confusion of arriving, (for the train had made no other stoppage between the station above named, and its ultimate destination,) the stranger had contrived to evaporate, for no one left the said *coupé* but a thin, wiry individual, short-haired and close-shaven, with a travelling-bag (very like that of the former) in one hand, and a compactly-strapped bundle of overcoats or wrappers in the other, all of which he deposited at once with his own person in a cab, which then drove rapidly from the station. Thomas Clinton could not, for the life of him, think on what grounds it was that this last figure seemed not unknown to him, but the prosecution of the business he had in hand soon drove the whole matter from his mind.

It was about half-past ten o'clock A.M. when the



colonel entered his vehicle, and desired the man to drive in the first place to Claw Lane, City, where Messrs Wright and Thoroughpace transacted business.

"The very best time for catching him at work," thought Clinton. "Not that I have much to say to the old gentleman—still that little may as well be said."

Mr Wright, was, as he had anticipated, within, and now from his accustomed seat surveyed the arrival with a sort of curious smile, peering over the rims of his spectacles.

"Well?" said he, inquiringly, as they shook hands.

"Behold!" was the equally curt reply, as the baronet's missive was held forth to view. Mr Wright, with more appearance of excitement than was usual with him, slapped his "shepherd's plaids."

"Right?" was Clinton's next inquiry, as he received back the despatch, and replaced it in his pocket-book.

"As a trivet; and a weary, foolish business is drawing to a close at last." The solicitor took off his spectacles, wiped and placed them on the desk beside him, and settled himself in his chair with an expression on his face which meant, "I have leisure at your command, my dear sir; you may tell me all how and about it, if you think fit; but I shan't press you if you don't."

"There is little to tell," said Clinton, answering the look and gesture. "I am empowered to seek this Thornfield, bearing with me credentials, as you see; but, having mentioned that I am in possession of all the sad story connected with this case, I feel that I need say nothing fur-

ther on the subject. It is strange, however, that although Sir Ralph made no direct mention of his confidential relations with yourself, it seems to be tacitly understood that you are acquainted with the whole facts."

"Doubtless, doubtless, my dear cornel; the solicitor is the Protestant Briton's father confessor, you know. But there's no occasion for us to enter upon that matter, e'en now. Ye'll be off on your travels then, no doubt; or d' ye want that bit note sent?"

"I shall go myself, and that without loss of time;" and Clinton gave the old gentleman a full account of the turn events had taken within the last few days at the hall, including the compact of a month's time for deciding upon St Alban's demand. The lawyer mused.

"A month—ay, ye'll better just gang, then, for if Thornfield were not forthcoming by that time, it might lead to a complication. Humph—ha—he's a clever fallow, Monkshood Vale—a very clever fallow," continued Mr Wright, in a tone which was not altogether devoid of admiration; "but he's been playin' a losin game, though he disna think it; wastin' gude ammunition on a tatty-bogle—d' ye ken what that is, cornel? Did the Sikhs, or the Affghauns, (Aff-ga'ens? bonny on ga'ens they made,) did they never beguile ye into firin' shot and shell at a wheen dressed-up dummies ahint a mud wa'?"

"I think I partly understand you."

"A' right!—a' right! We'll no enter into particulars now. What are ye proposin' to do then, cornel; and what can I do to help ye?"

"Simply, then, I start for Gibraltar the day after to-morrow. Will that do? Is the scent warm, Mr Wright? In plain terms, is Thornfield to be met with there, and without loss of time?"

"Whether or no, ye cannot do better. D'ye ken the man by sight? No—hum—he's a very honest-lookin' chield, when ye look twice at him; but the deevil's in 't if I can tell exactly how to describe him, except that he's about as broad as he's lang frae shouther to shouther—a man gifted with fearfu' bodily strength—lucky it's balanced wi' sae canny a heart, though Basil can be gruesome enough when he likes, for he's led an unquiet life, puir fallow! Hem—weel-a-weel! ye'll hae na trouble, I should say, in finding him, for he'll be thick, no doubt, wi' the officers of the garrison; and Gibraltar's a place where ye just canna help fa'in' in wi' folk, whether ye want to see them or no."

"That is all right, then. I am intimately acquainted with the officers of one regiment there, at all events. You have nothing further to suggest?"

"I can see nothing else that is necessary. Ye'll have no difficulty with Basil, when once ye've pitten hands on him, except he's for aff on one of his wild errands, and I think he would postpone even that to the business in hand. And he'll introduce ye, maybe, to somebody that will astonish ye."

"Ah! the boy, perhaps."

"The boy—humph—he's the boy for us at ony rate; but you're on the move, I see; some sma' preparation to make, doubtless; fare ye well, then, sir, and good luck go wi' you!"

After Clinton's departure, Mr Wright, chuckling to himself, as he kept up an underflow of unintelligible muttering, proceeded to the apartment of his junior partner. That gentleman was indulging himself with a cigar, which he laid aside when Mr Wright's tap at the door announced his advent.

"How do the accounts of the Stantonwells property stand, Alfred?" asked the latter, taking up a position on the hearthrug with his hands clasped behind his back.

"Stantonwells," responded Mr Thoroughpace, selecting a tome from among divers others at his elbow. "Oh, Sir Ralph Maudesley's little place down in—hum—um—m. Why, you know, sir, the rents have been untouched for years, with the exception of just what was necessary to keep up the place. There must be a considerable balance, in a small way, at the current-account there. Is he thinking of building—or what?"

"Maybe; any way, ye'd better get everything correctly balanced up to the present date, and all particulars ascertained, for there will be an inquiry into it soon, I expect."

"Aha! Sir Ralph beginning to think of the pence, the pounds being so safe with us. By the by—what? No chance of any addition to the family at this time of the day?"

"Nothing of the kind, as far as I'm aware. But I think he'll be takin' more interest in Stantonwells soon than he's done heretofore."

"Well, he'll find everything ship-shape, I take it," said Mr Thoroughpace, paring his nails. "The house and

grounds are let, but the lease will expire in November, and he can do what he likes about renewing it. Old Chutney will be sorry to leave, however; the waters suit him, he says."

"Never mind; there may be a different arrangement, and the general, honest man, can go elsewhere. I'm glad the account is in sae healthy a state, however."

And Mr Wright, in some dread of exciting more curiosity in his partner's mind than was advisable in the present state of affairs, retired to his own sanctum, where he remained for some time in a state of considerable excitement, and made one or two abstruse numerical calculations, all of which he destroyed as soon as completed.

And Thomas Clinton sailed in the good steamer *Tagus* for the sunny south.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TRIP TO MALAGA.

EARLY on the morning of the 12th of August—a morning it was which gave glorious promise for the day—Gormansby's yacht, the saucy little *Bittern*, hauled out from the New Mole harbour of Gibraltar, and almost immediately hoisting her snowy mainsail and gib before the favouring westerly breeze, glided away past Rosia, and round Europa Point. The little vessel made up four berths besides the owner's cabin, the former being occupied by Colonel Marston, Thornfield, and Wilmot, a fourth having been added to the number contrary to Gormansby's general rule, in the shape of a Captain Graves belonging to his own corps. What could have induced Gormansby to relax his code in favour of this latter would have been rather a mystery to those who knew him not, for Graves was one of those of whom it might be emphatically said that "there was nothing in him;" but this operated in no way to his disadvantage with Gormansby, who, as long as they gave no trouble and seemed quietly to appreciate good living, asked for little else in his associates.

As we love to chronicle small events, we shall glance for

a moment at the rueful countenance of the subaltern or guard at the New Mole, as he watches mournfully the track of the *Bittern* over the crisp curling blue waves, till she is lost to view by the intervening headland. In vain will he retire upon bitter beer and a mild "*dos amigos*;" in vain seek solace in that cornopean, well-known and dreaded by his next-door neighbours in barracks. His performance on the latter will, however, give rise to an animated, not to say fierce discussion between Sergeant Phelim O'Shaughnessy, of the Royal County Bingo, and Gunner Neil M'Kinlay; each of whom—Phelim of the swart whisker and twinkling dark eye, and Neil not quite "like an angel," though with bright hair—will claim the melody for his native land. It is "*Casta Diva*," honest soldiers—childlike in spirit, lionlike in heart—therefore well is it that your argument should stop, as it does, short of wrath.

In the meantime, how shall we describe the ecstatic enjoyment which seemed to pervade every fibre of Frank Wilmot's frame, as the gallant little cutter, bounding from wave to wave before the fresh breeze, seemed actually to skim their foaming crests, instead of cutting through them, and left each familiar landmark, one by one, far in her wake. Sea sickness he never bestowed a thought on. Sickness! The very word seemed out of place while such a breeze filled his lungs, and lifted the damp curls from his ruddy cheek! When, breakfast being over, cigars were lighted by all (with the exception of Thornfield, who produced the never-failing meerschaum,) Frank felt as if

earthly enjoyment could go no further. Ah! youngster, revel in that feeling while you may—note how the breezes which fan your cheek speed rapidly by; others are following, and will follow for a space, but they will not last for ever, nor will they long bring with them the same glad music for *you*, which makes your blood dance in ecstasy now. Look round on the brows of your seniors, and gather wisdom from what you see—even Graves, next to yourself in years, sits with a calmer, colder light in his eye than sparkles in your own. Gormansby is solemn, though complacent; and those two wrestlers in the world's cruel ring,—those fishers in troubled waters, long tossed on the sea of Fortune without helm or compass,—there is actual melancholy in their grim regards, albeit half touched in spirit by your infectious joy of heart. Do you think the time will not come for *you* also, when the eye will wax dim, and the spirit weary—wearied and heavy-laden, perchance with thoughts of the flowerets you might have gathered, but left to rot on the stem! Why should you think to escape the common lot? 'twill neither pass you by, nor linger on the way.

But what say you—no flowerets? None, or few and far between. Man of the smooth, cool brow, bright eye, and active, painless limbs—each passing moment is a blossom in the garden of your existence! Pluck it, or not, as you list. There is a bright vista before you, but you will not meet the mournful eyes which gaze at your progress from without the pales, nor listen to the voices which bid you remember, that upon the path you tread there is no turning.



Other voices, too, will seek to make themselves heard from time to time, and will be distinct and diverse in the tendency of their admonitions. One calls attention to the garish weeds that grow beside the flowers, and bids you remark the greater brilliance of their hues; another mingles flowers and weeds together in one sweeping denunciation as snares laid by the devil. "On to the goal" is the never-changing burden of this one's song—"touch nothing, enjoy nothing—cover your eyes with your mantle—heap dust and ashes on your head"—be "*me miserable!*" your cry, to the brink of the silent grave!

One other voice there is—a small, still one—ah! youngster, if you would but give ear to that! It will bid you take the middle path,—not the least alluring or most rugged,—where the fragrant flowers grow here and there among the turf, and the gaudy poison weeds have no place. Five chances to one you will not heed it,—and by and by you will have fifty specious reasons to shew for not having done so. *Vale!* dear juvenile—*vale!* Why should you be a wiser man than your father was before you? The ancient bedesman's benison be upon you. Heaven be indeed your guide!

Thus sped on the *Bittern* past Estepona and the line of bright sand-edged coast towards Marbella, till the voyagers gazed on the sunny peaks of the towering Sierra Nevada. Who could be sad with such an atmosphere to breathe, and such scenes to glad the eye? Not any of those whose movements we are now recording, for one at least was brimful, buoyant, with new-born hope and vigorous life;

others were content with existence as they found it, and neither saw reason to doubt its prolongation, nor cause to wish it altered; a third—it is no easy task to analyse his sensations at such moments as these; they were as the halt for rest and refreshment, perhaps, on the great battle-field of the world—enjoyment he scarcely knew; fear he had none; and hope, if such a feeling ever visited his breast, began for him where this life ends.

As the hour of noon drew nigh, the mid-day sun rendered the deck somewhat less pleasant, the more especially as, with its increasing power, the breeze rather lessened, though sufficient remained to urge the little vessel gently forward at the rate of five or six knots an hour. Luncheon being disposed of, Marston and Gormansby sat down to chess in the cabin, and Graves, stretching himself at full length on a sofa, ostensibly perused *Galignani*, and in reality fell fast asleep with the paper over his face.

“I was up—before four—’clogh—gh—ogh”—were the last words (for the present) of Captain William Graves.

Thornfield and Wilmot remained on deck. “I should not dislike being a porpoise,” half soliloquised the latter, as he watched the uncouth gambols of a shoal of those animals, which were tumbling about under the bows of the vessel. Thornfield, seated cross-legged on the deck, and engaged as usual with a pipe, replied gravely—

“Neither should I, if there were no such thing as a shark.”

Frank laughed and nodded assent; Basil continued in the same strain—“They are better off than their human

fellow-creatures, after all. They have no fears nor anxieties to torment them, until the teeth of the enemy grate on their backbone. Whereas, man the hunted, as distinguished from man the hunter, goes through life trembling at his own shadow, and seeing a persecutor in every finger-post."

"I should think *your* nerves made of better stuff," remarked Wilmot.

"They are," responded his companion; "had it been otherwise, I might have been a tailor."

"Then I think," said Frank, laughing, "you may thank your stars for the physical conformation which averted that stroke of destiny."

"Do you? I am not quite sure that the world would be unanimous in agreeing with you." There was a pause, during which Thornfield sent clouds of vapour thick and fast from beneath his yellow moustache. "Should you care to listen to a sketch of a vagabond's history?" asked he.

"I should like nothing better than to hear something of yours," responded Frank, not only curious, but also rather flattered at the idea of being received into the confidence of the strange being before him.

"*Bueno!* Sit down, then; we have the deck to ourselves. I wish there was an awning, though, for your sake—h'm? You like the sun? Inshallah! You will get through the world, young man. Well—to commence from as near the beginning as I—hem!—hem!

"I was born, I believe, somewhere in the north of England. My father was what the story-books denominate a

Thespian—what you and I call a strolling player. My mother I never to my knowledge came in contact with after that period at which I could distinguish one person from another. I was given to understand that she had been of the same calling as my father; and from what I gathered then, and recollected afterwards, when I could ‘put two and two together,’ as the saying is, I am led to believe that any ceremony connected with the church was reckoned superfluous between her and him. I startle you, and you blush; the honest blush of one accustomed to guard the name of a parent in the inmost shrine of his heart. *Que voulez vous?* Were some insolent hound to throw in my teeth the very assertion I am half making, I should probably act as you would—strike him down then and there; but I am relating a simple fact to one who will not abuse the confidence, and she has ever been to me a shadow and a myth!”

Basil here once more puffed fiercely in silence for a few moments, and then resumed his tale.

“My father did not treat me badly—rather the contrary, as far as seldom chiding and never beating me went; and when no boon companions of his own time of life were at hand, he would discourse to me in a maudlin way over his cups, of the hard fate which dogged his footsteps, rendering nugatory his endeavours to regain what he was pleased to consider his rightful position—for he was born a gentleman. Often has he spoken on those occasions of my grandfather, the parson, and the mistaken rigour which drove him, my father, to the wild courses which were his

ruin; but having once got there, the demon of drink, to whom he had long sold himself, body and soul, could tell the reason why he never turned back.

“In this manner, travelling from town to town, sometimes better, sometimes worse off, as regards food and clothing—never much depressed in spirits, for that was not my way—I managed to get through life till I was about twelve years old. One kind boon Providence accorded me—an early and rooted disgust for the vice which was dragging my father to swift perdition. That has remained to me through life, and has pulled me through on many occasions, when I might have been expected to have stuck in the mire; for with a tolerable conscience, young gentleman, and a scorn for the delusion of false stimulus, one cannot sink beyond retrieval in the ‘Slough of Despond.’ *Au reste*,” said Thornfield, stretching forth his prodigious right arm, and clenching his muscular hand, “you see what I am in a physical point of view—with this frame and a light heart, I was not likely to starve. Well, something happened at this time—I shall not enter into details regarding it—it was a scrape, and, of course, connected with my father’s weakness, which made it advisable for him to leave his native land. He did so, carrying me along with him, and we settled, after a little wandering here and there, in Paris. My parent was a man of more than ordinary talent and acquirements; among others he possessed that of being a first-rate linguist, and he gave lessons, actually with some degree of success, in various tongues, including his own. In this manner he kept the

wolf from the door, and might have even made a respectable livelihood, but for that element in his composition along with which respectability could not exist. Among others who came to him at first as pupils, was a middle-aged *bourgeois*, a *marchand de modes*—tailor, in fact, who had established a business connexion in London, and conceived that it would be for his advantage to learn something of the English language. He soon saw reason to discontinue his attendance—as they all did, one after another; but in the meantime he had taken a sort of fancy for your humble servant, based partly on pity, I fancy, for my position, which was a trying one; and, on my father's one day announcing a determination to return to England, he, Monsieur Pierre Grosbois, much to my astonishment, stepped forward with a proposal to take charge of me and my fortunes, to train me up to his own business, and to adopt me as his son and successor, in case he saw no reason to change his opinion of my deserts.

“My father hesitated; lost as he was, he had a share of natural feeling—and I remonstrated, though not strongly, for I was as nearly heart-broken as it was in my nature to be, with the life we led, and I felt that I was useless as a check upon him. Therefore, so it was arranged; we parted, and sorely I wept in doing so, for I loved him—I did, by G—! though I could not respect him; and some sort of prescience told me that our parting was to be for ever, as regards this world.

“I staid in Paris, then, with my new protector,” continued Basil, talking somewhat hoarsely, and fast. “I be-

lieve he thought I soon forgot the old one, and that I was justified in so doing ; he was mistaken, I take it, on both points. Well, my new friend, Monsieur Grosbois, proposed bringing me up to his own calling, as I have said ; I demurred in my secret heart, but made no attempt to avert what I looked upon as a loathsome fate.

“ One day, however—a Sunday, I remember—as I was strolling moodily in the Bois de Boulogne, I was startled by the screams and shouts of a sort of mob, some distance off, and the ejaculations and scuttling from one side to the other of the spruce citizens near at hand. I had scarce time to wonder what was the matter, when, the road being effectually cleared, I became aware of a low carriage, now close upon me, drawn by two Arab ponies, which, having taken fright, were dashing along at full speed, the reins trailing on the ground, and the vehicle itself threatening to capsize every moment. Within it sat, apparently paralyzed by terror, an elderly person, dressed as a *bonne*, along with a brace of children, who were panic-stricken and attempting to jump out ; but from this act of madness she had still sense enough left to prevent them.

“ I had no time to think ; but my nerves were like iron even then—I was about fourteen—and for speed I could have run a match with a zebra. With one dash, I was alongside. The pony next me swerved for a moment, and then both, if possible, accelerated their motion ; but that momentary pause had given me, as I expected, time to grasp the reins. I did not hang back at once, and try to arrest them with a jerk ; that might have been dangerous ;

but I ran *with* them, exercising a gradually-increasing power over their mouths, till they began, in spite of their terror, to flag; and I had shouted an admonition to those within the vehicle to sit still as they valued their lives. So much for that. I stopped the animals, after all, with little difficulty, and the nurse and her charges were saved from what might have been a real peril; for the ponies, when I first saw them, were swerving off among the trees, and Frenchmen of that class who were looking on are not the sort of persons to act first and discuss the danger afterwards. As soon as I saw the children safe, and the staring, gesticulating idiot of a driver had come up breathless, with the skin all off his nose, (he had thrown himself off the box into the road when the ponies first started off, and had better luck than he deserved in not breaking his neck,) I made my bow and departed, unheeding a scream from madame, bearing reference to my name and address.

"Is there no instinct, I wonder, to point out to a man the turning-point of his destiny? In my case there was none, for I thought no more of the matter, though the tailor was merged in the man-at-arms from the date of that morning's episode; no small metamorphosis, whether for better or for worse; which part of the question I shall decline discussing with the Reverend Messrs Groan-again and Howl-louder."

Here Basil paused to refill his pipe, and Frank Wilmot laughed, but abstained from making any remark which might have interfered with the current of the narrative.

"Three days or so after this," continued the former, "I



was loitering down the Boulevard des Italiens when a carriage being suddenly drawn up close by me, dispersed one of my usual reveries, and a shout in a child's voice made me hastily turn round; it was the carriage and the ponies I had stopped in the Bois de Boulogne, and the child was the elder of the two whose heads I had perhaps saved from being cracked like eggshells against the trunk of some tree. Seated, however, where the worthy *bonne* had on that day reared her prim front was a tall, elderly man in the uniform of a colonel of the Imperial Guard, Grenadiers, with gray hair and moustache, and an empty sleeve. With a sort of dignified kindness of manner he beckoned me to the side of the carriage; there was command as well as invitation in the gesture, and I obeyed. It is needless to describe what he said; I will tell you the result of our conversation—three months afterwards, I was a pupil and cadet in the Military College of St Cyr. My worthy father by adoption actually objected when Colonel de Belgarde's proposal was mooted to him! I hope I was not ungrateful, but when it became a question between a yard measure and a *sabre de regulation*—pooh—pooh—the die was cast, sir. We parted, and there—at least so I thought—was an end to all relations between Pierre Grosbois and myself.

“I will not trouble you with an account of my career at the college. My expenses were liberally defrayed by my new patron, and I got on smoothly enough in other respects. French boys are, according to my experience, more free from petty jealousies regarding nationality and

so forth than those of our own country, and my antecedents were little inquired into; not at all, in fact, after a—humph—a slight hint had been given that I loved not interrogation on such matters. In point of intelligence and aptitude for picking up the details of military duty I was abreast of the first rank; in physical capability for hard work I believe I may say I stood first of all. The French know better than we do both how to investigate those matters, and to put them to use when ascertained. I had good backers, besides, and in two years' time from the date of my entering the college, I was posted as a sous-lieutenant to a regiment of *chasseurs à cheval*, serving in Africa. Off I went, after a parting interview with De Belgarde, in which he gave me many kind admonitions, and presented me with a sum of one thousand francs, which he assured me should be repeated annually. I forgot to mention that I had heard once from Monsieur Grosbois during my residence at St Cyr. This was to announce the death of my father, which took place in a public hospital in London. No need to specify the malady; the demon of alcohol, after tossing him about in sport for so many years, had fastened his claws in his heart at last. He had never apparently made the slightest inquiry after me since we parted, and Monsieur Grosbois, in announcing his demise, made no allusion to anything of the sort; but I will not believe that he did not sometimes yearn after the son he had wept to part from, albeit in certain moods tears were apt to be ready at his behest, and therefore not worth much, perhaps. Peace be with him, unhappy old outcast! Hah!

bah! the smoke from the caboose comes this way; wind heading us; and they're always cooking forward there, I think—puff—puff—puff.

“*Ma foi!* there was a fate against those who troubled themselves with my fortunes. Pierre Grosbois was carried to his grave about the time I started on my first *razzia*. This intelligence was conveyed to me by his heir, a nephew of his, who had served as I did behind the counter, but who, liking the business, stuck there; and De Belgarde, who had promised to look after my advancement, about a twelvemonth after was thrown from his horse at a review in the *Champs de Mars*, and taken up with his skull fractured; he never rallied. Behold me, then, alone in the world at the age of barely eighteen; but I was one not ill-fitted to struggle against such trying circumstances. I had saved some of my late patron's generous allowance, had no expensive habits, and my ideas of refinement culminated in the possession of a trustworthy blade, and a charger up to my weight. One way or another I never wanted for either. The private troopers generally liked me; as for my relations with my brother-officers they were rather peculiar. In the discussions which constantly enlivened the barrack quarters or the bivouac regarding the comparative qualities of the different European races, I, somewhat like an ass, never attempted to conceal my leaning towards my native land—therein lay a point much at issue between my comrades and myself, for they held, not unreasonably, that, being French by adoption, I had either no right to hold my present position, or most decidedly none to advo-

cate the cause of France's most unwavering, and—let them try to bluster it off as they might—most dreaded antagonist. Swords in those days, and in that region, leaped easily from the scabbard, and in the course of four or five years I had to fight at least twice as many duels; but after that time I had a more tranquil life of it, for I had established a sort of—in fact, my comrades wearied of a game, the chances of which were so much against them.

“At last, however, an event took place which sapped, if it did not overturn my popularity with the rank and file, as you call them. We had been out on a foraging expedition to a district some way from Algiers—the Beni Yusef—in the course of which, it was found advisable to burn, and of course to sack, a village. It is strange how a short period of such campaigning as we saw in Africa changes the very nature of a man. Those young lads who, a few years—months even—before, would have hesitated to wring the neck of a pigeon, and blubbered at leaving home, as they knelt to receive a parting benediction from the *curé* of their village, hardened under the influence of temptation and a bad example, into something as bad as could be met with among the ferocious tribes against whom they waged ‘war to the knife.’ You may believe me, however, when I affirm that my Anglo-Saxon nature preserved me intact from any such contagion.

“At divers times I had interfered, as far as in me lay, to save from outrage helpless beings, whom the fortune of war placed at the mercy of those who had learned to scoff at the name. Let me do my brother-soldiers justice—the

savage reprisals wreaked upon them by the infuriated foe, whenever chance placed the opportunity within his grasp, afforded some sort of excuse or palliation for the cruel manner of their warfare.

“On the occasion in question, I came upon a marauding group of my own regiment in the act of treating brutally the family of one of the Moorish leaders; an emir, they said, who had just saved his own life by flight, without having it in his power to carry with him the inmates of his harem. My arm, then—as ever—was at the service of the helpless and oppressed, without regard to sex, creed, or colour. You think I am indulging in a bit of self-glorification! No? Well, whether or not, in justice to myself, I must let in what rays of light I can on a career which otherwise is dark enough—dark red—a bad colour; but what good housewives call a ‘fast’ one, for which we have, besides, the authority of Shakspeare and others. You have read the dramatic history of Macbeth—the royal ninny? Of course; and I need not explain myself further on this point.

“Hah! well—I saved the women, and drew down upon myself the revengeful feelings of the whole corps, for I had established a precedent, which, if followed, would have much interfered with their prerogative. A few were spurred by wrath to active measures of resistance; and one of them, a corporal, a savage at heart, though almost a gentleman by birth and education, infuriated at seeing his prey wrenched from his grasp, opposed authority with the edge of his sabre, and—and—gave me some little trouble

in disposing of him. The case came up afterwards for investigation; my superior officers could not but uphold me for shame, if for no better feeling; and but that—a humph—it was scarcely convenient for the corporal to stand before a tribunal, he would have been tried by court-martial there and then; but, as I have mentioned, I was not altogether so high in their good books, as to make them willing to embroil themselves in a quarrel between officer and man—(you, an English officer, do not understand such a state of things)—on my account.

“In fine, it being evident that I was no longer obeyed for love, and such campaigning being terribly uphill work on any other terms, I one day went to the *chef de bataillon* and told him plainly that it would not do. He was an old comrade of De Belgarde’s; had always treated me with much consideration, and I had no difficulty in placing before him the real state of the case. Well, I soon saw I had no occasion to be prolix, for that I was addressing one who had carefully taken note of the affair in all its bearings. The *chef de bataillon*, Dupré, stroked his beard, and slowly pulled first one moustache and then the other. He was not quite prepared for my broaching the matter as I did, and I saw that he was slightly embarrassed, as though fully prepared to act upon what I told him, and yet uncertain how to do it graciously, as be-seemed one who had promised an old comrade to look after the interests of his *protégé*.

“‘I shall be sorry to lose you,’ said he, addressing me by the name given me by old Grosbois years before—what

it was is unimportant, and I hate it, for to that name was, for the first and last time during the career of him who bore it, affixed the stamp of disgrace!"

Here Basil's complexion glowed, and his nostrils quivered and expanded, giving his countenance an expression Frank had never yet seen it wear. It soon passed off, however, and he resumed in a careless tone.

"But I am anticipating—ahem! 'I shall be sorry to lose you,' quoth the *chef de bataillon*; 'but I am not certain whether, as things are, a different sphere of action might not better develop your undeniably valuable qualities as a soldier, peculiarly tempered as those qualities are. You are a brave man, sous-lieutenant, and a stalwart; but your heart is the heart of a girl, in one sense—a sense which does you credit, *mon enfant*! and my opinion is that *ces autres là* may be more fitted for this special style of campaigning than yourself, who elsewhere might probably be worth two of the best of them. Besides,' continued he, 'you have now embroiled yourself with the men of your squadron; and my candid opinion is, that on our next expedition, you would run a considerable chance of getting a bullet through the back of your head, *mon brave*! you, who rarely present that mark to an enemy. *Au reste*, I have interest enough at the *bureau* of the war minister to get you transferred to the home establishment. You have passed through five years uninterrupted service in the field. Take a furlough, if you like, to France. I will manage the rest; and God speed you.'

"Under the circumstances, I fancy, this was about the

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best arrangement that could have been made. I thanked the *chef de bataillon*, who was not a bad fellow in the main, nor more of a humbug than the average; and in about a fortnight afterwards, I got a passage on board a fruit-vessel to Marseilles. I came at once to Paris, for I was anxious to get posted somewhere as soon as possible; and, besides, I wanted to hear about old Grosbois's decease, and whether he had mentioned me at all in his dying moments. I never thought of deriving pecuniary benefit from his testamentary disposition; but though I was not, and never had been what could be termed 'fond of' the old man, still I was alone in the world, and it would have been a satisfaction to me to know that my early protector had thought kindly of me at the last. I found that nephew of his, of whom I spoke, in possession of the old premises and the business. He looked anything but enraptured to see me, I fancied; but, as we had been always good enough friends during the old man's lifetime, and I shewed no symptom of an inclination to be inquisitive, he, after a minute or two of palpable hesitation, grew suddenly quite affable, and even asked me to put up in his house for a day or two till I could arrange my plans.

"I had no wish for the society of Monsieur Jean Grosbois, but having nowhere else to go to, and being anxious to save what small funds I had, I accepted his offer without hesitation. Two or three days passed away quietly enough. I waited on the *Ministre de la Guerre*—or rather attended at his office—and found that there was little chance of anything being done in my case for a while, as



I had outstripped the *chef de bataillon's* despatch on its journey home, and nothing was known about me; in fact, for reasons upon which I need not enlarge, my wisest course was to keep as quiet as possible till the mail from Algeria should arrive.

"At last, one evening, my worthy host and cousin by adoption came home in unusually high spirits—elated by the successful issue of some trade speculation, and, after indulging in more than one *verre de cognac blanc*—a weakness of his—suddenly proposed a visit to one of the theatres, and, as he expressed it, making a night of it. Ass! that fortunate hit of the morning, whatever it was, was the dearest he had made for many years. I had no objection, though I cared little for that mode of passing my time, and we set off for the "*Variétés*;" saw performed I know not what; and adjourned afterwards to a *café*, where more cognac was the order of the day with him, until at last the abuse he had commenced heaping upon me, on the score of my not following his precious example, became thick and incoherent. He seemed possessed by some sort of cunning notion that I was playing the spy on him, and that while abstaining myself, I was encouraging him to excess, which was laughable enough, as I did all I could to restrain him in his debauch; but he had by this time got to the true quarrelsome pitch, and I had, more than once, to wrest the caraffe from his hand, which he was vaguely aiming at my head, though certainly with no great accuracy, for he swore that I kept dancing round him, like a *pierrot*, chair and all.

"All at once, his chin dropped upon his breast—at one slide he tumbled upon the floor, and the game was up for the time. It was late, and we were almost alone, so I called the *garçon*, ordered a *fiacre*, and hoisting in Monsieur Jean before me, drove home to the Rue Lepelletier, where he lived. The motion of the vehicle, which made him sick, restored to him in some measure the use of his tongue—not of his senses, for when I had got him lugged upstairs to his apartment, and had deposited him on a couch, he began to chatter vacantly, with apparently some sort of idea where he was, but a total unconsciousness of my identity, who had been with him throughout the evening. What strange phases intoxication sometimes presents! As the moon-calf glared idiotically upon my countenance, by the light of an oil lamp which stood on the table between us, my features somehow seemed to connect themselves with the thread of his meditations, without conveying to his mind the fact of my presence, for he began to hiccup forth strange revelations addressed to some imaginary listener.

"*C'est un fou!—un vrai fou!*" slavered he, with limp gesticulation. '*Je vous dis il n'y a pas de danger—ce n'est qu'un gros imbécile, ce chasseur d'Afrique—ne sait rien, et ne cherche pas d'apprendre plus*'——

"I smoked on without saying a word, for I found he was talking of myself to the afore-mentioned shadowy personage, and I was fearful lest the sound of my voice should dissolve the spell; so he maundered on. I need not follow out the precise expressions he used; let it suffice that the debased cur, making good the maxim that dishonest folks

had need keep their wits about them in the presence of their dupes, fairly divulged the secret that he, in concert with some unscrupulous beast of a notary, had suppressed the fact that a legacy amounting to some thousands of francs had been left by poor old Grosbois to his adopted son, the sous-lieutenant—hum—(whatever it was he called me)—at his demise four years ago!

“My excellent host, after a vehement expression of his desire to cut the nose off my face for not speaking to him, relapsed into a state of stupor, under cover of which, I got him thrust, clothes and all, into bed. Next morning, when he came into our sitting apartment, pale, squeamish, and trembling like an aspen, I waited till he had swallowed one *petit verre*, thereby infusing a spark of vitality into his wretched carcase, and then, arresting his hand in the act of conveying a second to his lips, taxed him plump with his confession of the night before, and sternly demanded restitution. You never saw a man so taken aback. The first effect of the shock was to turn him quite sick; I paused till this was over, and then, without giving him time to think, returned to the charge.

“There would be nothing entertaining to you in the details of our conversation. I think he would have brazened the matter out, but luckily I had got hold of the notary’s name who had assisted him in his rascality, and Monsieur Jean was doubtful how *he* might act in case of being attacked on the subject by me, before they could lay their heads together. The final result was, after a good deal of clumsy fencing and miserable prevarication—tears, even—

faugh!—on his part, that I compromised with him for about two-thirds of the amount he had named in his cups—eight thousand francs down, there and then; and, shaking the dust off my boots, I left the slave, half hugging himself in the free enjoyment of part of the proceeds of his villainy, half cursing the insane folly which had deprived him of the rest.

“I remained in Paris some time after quitting the hospitable roof of this pattern executor, and I often saw him during that time; not unfrequently sitting with a hanging under lip and glazed eye, at one of the little tables of a certain restaurant; but, as you may suppose, we did not inquire much after each other’s health. Then I presented myself once more at the *bureau* of the *Ministre de la Guerre*. The facts of my case, as stated by Dupré, having reached that office at last, I was received with tolerable courtesy, and not long after posted, though but in my present grade, to a regiment of the line in garrison somewhere. It was an infantry regiment—*chasseurs au pied*—which I regretted, but it was better than nothing, and having already trenched somewhat on my small capital, I was anxious to keep as much as possible in reserve against ‘bad times.’”

Here there was another pause, and the gleam of mirth which had from time to time lighted up the countenance of the narrator faded into stern gravity. He removed his pipe from between his lips, knocked out the ashes, and consigned it to a pocket within the breast of his coat.

“In your service,” continued he, speaking with clenched

teeth and a corrugated brow, "an officer who has been tried and sentenced to dismissal by court-martial goes through life with a brand upon his name—*n'est ce pas ?* "

"That would depend much upon the facts of the case," stammered Wilmot, rather taken aback.

"I don't know that a detail of those which procured me that distinction would mend the matter in your eyes. The actual disgrace, perhaps, lay more in the penalty than the offence. The charge was neglect of duty, and I suppose the finding and sentence were just; but the widely different service to which I had been accustomed, and the devilish ingenuity brought to bear against me—not that there was any malice directed towards me in particular—might have pleaded something in my favour. Perhaps they did; my sentence, but for those extenuating circumstances, might have been more severe; but, at all events, I was dismissed from the service of the king of France.

"How I got over the first few days of my existence afterwards I can scarcely tell. My brain seemed traversed by a whirlwind of shame, indignation, despair. I had almost, I believe, at one time taken to the mode of solace resorted to by my late father, and my respectable friend of the Rue Lepelletier. I thank Heaven, I had strength given me to resist the promptings of the fiend in that direction. When I came, as it were, to my senses, I necessarily began to ponder what course remained to me; and the effort of having to think restored me in a great measure to myself.

"A comrade of mine, who had left the French service

some years previously under circumstances somewhat similar to my own, had thereon entered that of the Ottoman Porte, and had climbed to high preferment in a marvellously short space of time. I was in possession of a letter written by him from Constantinople about a year back, strongly recommending his example to my notice, and urging me to trust my fortunes to his guidance. For one reason or another, this individual's partiality for me had been scarcely mutual, and at the time I had not given his proposal a second thought, but now it came like a ray of light on my path. It was not my way to lose much time in deliberation. In three weeks' time, or less, I stood an adventurer on the shores of Stamboul. There was little difficulty in finding my friend, the *ci-devant* Capitaine La Fleur, now Gholum Bey, head officer of the Turkish police. What I was pleased to consider my usual luck, however, pursued me now. For some cause, to me unexplained, Gholum was in disgrace, and though he received me with no lack of *empressement*, he deplored the fact that, at the present time, the tide of favour in high quarters was at low ebb for the Franks, and that all he could do for me would be to appoint me to a subordinate office in his own department. 'If I chose to accept that in the meantime, and await patiently a change in the political atmosphere,' &c., &c., &c. What could I do? There was no demand for men of my stamp in their own particular line just then, but there would be little difficulty in transferring myself by and by to the ranks of the army, should occasion offer; so I accepted Gholum's proposition, and became a *kavashli*, a

sort of police officer of humble grade, the pay being nominal, but the perquisites pretty much what I had the talent to make them.

"Gholum Bey, being troubled with few scruples about trifles, had without hesitation abjured what he called his religion, and now professed himself a true son of Islam. He swore he found the same comfort in Mohammedanism that he had formerly in the Christian faith; and I believed him. Nevertheless, being less liberal in my views, I declined following his example there, and thus wanted an important round in the ladder by which he had risen to preferment. No matter; I did not remain long enough at my new trade to test its availabilities for a climbing genius—encumbered with a conscience!

"I was sent, shortly after appointment, to an out-station, and there, short as was the period I remained, I saw some queer doings; things done piously in the name of Allah and the prophet, which Christians would scarcely call the Author of their being and the Head of their Church to witness. I am not going to particularise the events of this period. The real turning-point of my destiny, after all, was here. I got acquainted with one who has been my friend and comrade through the succeeding portion of my life—yonder he sits below at chess—Gilbert Marston. I need not enlarge upon his qualities. You will know him better one day—hem—hem. No matter what was arranged between us; I kicked my kavass uniform to the devil, and went off to seek my fortune with one who has often brought peril upon my head in bringing it upon his

own, but never a blush upon my cheek for him or for myself.

"Yes; from that moment I date a new phase of existence. I had always, I believe, been honest, and, in my rough way, honourable, but I now learned to appreciate the chivalrous feelings of a gentleman,—a British gentleman, Captain Wilmot,—a being who, I implicitly believe, stands first in the ranks of this world's true nobility. Well, after settling some matters connected with the circumstances under which we met, we turned our steps towards Spain. Matters were pretty quiet all over Europe at the time, so it mattered little in what direction we steered; and we had reasons for wishing to be within easy hail of England.

Marston is, as you have doubtless heard, a man well-known throughout the military services of the Continent; we were not, therefore, long without finding employment, such as it was. My friend was, as I say, tolerably well known by reputation as a thorough practical soldier, though it was his whim, like myself, to travel about under a purser's name—a curious fancy, is it not? Do not hint to him that you are aware of this. You may know his real name some day—as for mine, it is of no consequence to any breathing creature. Carrying with him, as he did, high testimonials of efficiency from the head-quarters of nearly every army in Europe, Marston's services were sure to be at a premium, wherever experience was valuable, or organisation wanting.

—“He was almost immediately appointed to command a



newly-raised corps of dragoons—*cuirassiers*—at some distance from the capital, which was struggling to attain the character of a disciplined body, against the twofold impediments of ignorance and self-sufficiency—both traits peculiarly Spanish. Of course this conferred upon him a certain amount of regimental patronage, and I was, at his recommendation, appointed to a post somewhat equivalent to those of adjutant and riding-master combined in your service. Marston, in assuming the position assigned to him, necessarily displaced the officer who had previously held the command; this was a Spanish hidalgo, one Don Pedro Linares; a man brimful of that species of self-conceit which refuses enlightenment from any number of failures. He conceived a deadly animosity against both Marston and myself, and, strange as it may seem, against me in particular, for, while Marston took his measures with that quiet and dignified courtesy which disarmed open hostility, I had been less polite, and had let fall certain expressions not complimentary to his donship, in reference to the work cut out by him for his successor. I was foolish in so doing. I had had no opportunity at that time of studying the Spanish character, or I might have exercised more tact, but I had no idea of the full danger I ran from the revengeful rancour of that man's heart.

“About a month, I think, or six weeks after I had been at work, as I was passing through a narrow street after nightfall, on my way to Marston's quarters, where I had a room, two men made a sudden rush upon me from opposite sides of the way, and while one of them hung upon my

sword arm, the other, a powerful ruffian, struck a *navaja*—one of their country knives—deep into my left side. The point glanced off a small squad roll-book I carried in a breast-pocket, but the stab was bad enough to sicken me, and I was embarrassed in my efforts at resistance by the weight of the other scoundrel, who was trying to pin me down and to muffle my head in his *manta*. The same cause, however, prevented his comrade from following up his blow, though he hung over me watching for a chance at a vital spot. At this moment, by the blessing of Providence, footsteps and voices made themselves heard in the direction whence I had come. The two, after a random blow from the ruffian with the *navaja*, which was turned this time by the embroidery of my jacket, bolted; but not till, in spite of the *manta*, I had contrived to imprint on my memory a tolerable likeness of both, but especially of him whose kind intentions were the more marked of the two, and my debt to whom he need not set down as a bad one, while he and I exist!

“The footsteps proved to be those of a sergeant and a couple of troopers of the regiment, on their way to purchase bread and garlic for the use of their troop next day. The sergeant, Ruy Gomez, a brave fellow, would have given chase to the villains, but the two lads with him hung back, and muttered their disinclination to follow them to their probable haunts—a most murderous locality close at hand. So, being faint from loss of blood, which was dropping pretty fast from between my ribs, I gave orders as well as I could to let it alone, and they got me up and carried me

home to my quarters. Here Marston, much horrified, received me; a surgeon was sent for, and my wound being inspected, was pronounced to be an ugly one, but not dangerous to one of my constitution and habit of body.

"Well, sir, I had my suspicions, of course, as to the author of this pretty interlude, but I was at a loss for proofs sufficiently plain to entitle me to act upon them. Chance supplied these not long afterwards."

Here they were interrupted by the sailing-master of the yacht, who stepped up to them, touching his cap.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen, but we must go about, I expect. Breeze shifting to nor'ard, but she'll get it fair enough on the other tack."

Thornfield nodded, and Mr Stunsill proceeded towards the cabin hatchway.

"Must go about, Captain Gormansby, sir. Breeze shifted a full point and more."

"All right!" came in muffled tones from below.

"Ready 'bout!" sung out Mr Stunsill.

"Ay, ay, sir."

Slowly and gracefully round went the *Bittern*. "Haul!" and in two minutes' time, Thornfield and Wilmot having given a hand at the mainsheet, all was belayed afresh, and the cutter dancing once more over the waves on a new tack.

"Now, Captain Thornfield, for the remainder of your yarn," said Frank, seating himself on what was now the windward side of the deck.

"Do you really care about it? Well, there's not

much more to tell, and that I must summarise, for time is getting on, and I did not mean at starting to be so garrulous; where were we? Ah "——

But what came next may form the basis of a fresh chapter.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THORNFIELD'S NARRATIVE ENDED.

"I LAY," continued Thornfield, "for about six weeks, on the broad of my back; at about the end of that time, I began slowly to pick up again. The wound might not have been so tedious, perhaps, in other hands, but the old medico who attended me was an ass—dosed me with calomel, and wanted to bleed me, as if that had not been done sufficiently to commence with. Marston, however, who knew something of the broad principles of surgery, aided me in my resistance to what we knew was humbug, and in spite of the doctor I got round. No end of pains had been taken in the meantime, to try and ferret out the scoundrels who had attacked me, but all efforts were, for a time, fruitless. Chance, however, as I said, stepped in at last to the elucidation of the mystery. Quarrels had latterly, it appears, become matters of common occurrence between our men and the townspeople—the blackguards of the environs—a ruffianly set, half gipsy, half Spaniard—a bad cross. In one of these, which took place in a wine-shop, a trooper of ours was mortally wounded by a *navaja* stab. The assassin, wonderful to say, was seized by the

police, and, being brought into the presence of the dying man, was identified in the clearest manner. Seeing himself *in extremis*, the murderer, like most villains of his class, turned craven-hearted, and endeavoured to save himself by unlimited confession of bygone misdeeds—my eye, what a catalogue!—and the implication of others not always of his own rank. Among other trifles, in short, he alluded casually to a late attempt on the life of the capitan-adjutant of the dragoon regiment, conjointly with another scamp whom he named, and instigated by—I need scarcely tell you—Don Pedro Linares. Enough of the minor rascal—his confessions did not save him, for he was garotted shortly afterwards.

“In the meantime, I lay cursing every moment which elapsed, and brought me not health and strength, for I was furious at the author of my mishap—the head conspirator—and eager for reprisals. Ay, reprisals was the word I used to myself; it is only your untutored savage that openly hugs revenge to his bosom and calls it by its right name. Well—it was three months and more ere I felt myself thoroughly in case to undertake the business I had at heart, for Don Pedro, though not exactly my match as a swordsman, was no despicable antagonist, as men go, and it would not have done to have stood before him, blade to blade, as I was bent upon doing, without regaining, at all events, a considerable portion of my strength and activity.

“At last I determined to bring the matter to an issue. His donship had left the regiment, and retired to his country house, some miles distant, where he was residing with his wife and child—a little girl—in affection for

whom he lavished the one warm drop which is to be found, I fancy, at the core of almost the worst heart, and his was not that; no, it was only Spanish, after all. Heaven help me! I might have thought tenderly of the possibility of this, and been somewhat softened in my revengeful feeling towards him—I who had scarcely a friend in the world—but in my wrath I forgot it, as I have not and never shall forget the lesson that followed.

“Riding through the town accompanied by a friend, an officer of the regiment, selected because he hated Linares, who had snubbed him somehow; (it would not have been fair to have asked Marston to see me through the business, situated as he was;) I was painfully struck with the melancholy symptoms which everywhere met my eye, indicating the presence of some deadly epidemic. I now learned that a species of yellow fever was raging in the suburbs, and had even intruded upon the dwellings of the wealthier classes; disease is no respecter of persons, though it may be of salutary habits and wise precautions, and we met more than one funeral procession wending its mournful way to the cemetery.

“At last we came to Don Pedro’s *casa*—a pretty, white building of one story, with green sun-shades and so forth, in the midst of a spacious though somewhat neglected-looking garden. We were both struck with the silence and the air of gloom all around, but *I* was too full of the object I had in view to bestow much attention on the aspect of the place. The few servants we met looked somehow panic-stricken, and did not attempt either to

police, and, being brought into the presence of the dying man, was identified in the clearest manner. Seeing himself *in extremis*, the murderer, like most villains of his class, turned craven-hearted, and endeavoured to save himself by unlimited confession of bygone misdeeds—my eye, what a catalogue!—and the implication of others not always of his own rank. Among other trifles, in short, he alluded casually to a late attempt on the life of the capitan-adjutant of the dragoon regiment, conjointly with another scamp whom he named, and instigated by—I need scarcely tell you—Don Pedro Linares. Enough of the minor rascal—his confessions did not save him, for he was garotted shortly afterwards.

“In the meantime, I lay cursing every moment which elapsed, and brought me not health and strength, for I was furious at the author of my mishap—the head conspirator—and eager for reprisals. Ay, reprisals was the word I used to myself; it is only your untutored savage that openly hugs revenge to his bosom and calls it by its right name. Well—it was three months and more ere I felt myself thoroughly in case to undertake the business I had at heart, for Don Pedro, though not exactly my match as a swordsman, was no despicable antagonist, as men go, and it would not have done to have stood before him, blade to blade, as I was bent upon doing, without regaining, at all events, a considerable portion of my strength and activity.

“At last I determined to bring the matter to an issue. His donship had left the regiment, and retired to his country house, some miles distant, where he was living with his wife and child—a little girl—in a room at the



whom he lavished the one warm drop which is to be found. I fancy, at the core of almost the worst heart, and his was not that; no, it was only Spanish, after all. Heaven help me! I might have thought tenderly of the possibility of this, and been somewhat softened in my revengeful feeling towards him—I who had scarcely a friend in the world—but in my wrath I forgot it, as I have not and never shall forget the lesson that I drew.

"Riding through the town accompanied by a friend, an officer of the regiment, who rode because he loved horses, who had snubbed him sometime. It would not have been fair to have asked Martin to see me through the town, situated as he was. I was passing under the melancholy symptoms of a severe cold, my eyes indicating the presence of some deadly ailment. I now learned that a species of poison fever was raging in the suburbs, and all even infected by the exhalations of the warrens, and the streets were full of graves, though in many of the cemetery had not yet ~~provision~~ *provision*, and we met many of the funeral processions *winding* its mournful way to the cemetery.

"The last we saw of Mrs. Fenn's was—a pretty, white building of one story, with green eaves and so forth, in the midst of a spacious though somewhat neglected looking garden. We were both struck with the silence and the air of *desolation* around, but I was too full of the object I had

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 to draw much attention on the  
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 and did not attempt to state of

saw that his heart was broken—and, as I shall stand one day before the great Judge of all, from whom nothing is hid, I forgave him from the very depths of mine! I tried to tell him so, in my rough way; he looked vacantly at me for a time, but at last he began to understand me, I fancy, for, grasping my hand in both of his—and they felt like toasted parchment—he bent down his burning forehead upon it, and, falling upon his knees, on the marble floor before me, burst into a paroxysm of tears and sobs. I lifted him up and placed him on a seat of some kind; he strove to detain me, probably that he might thank me, or ask the forgiveness which was already accorded, but I, as gently as I could, disengaging my hand, placed it, I think, on his shoulder, with some vague idea of saying something, but could not get out a word. D——n it, why should I not confess the truth? I was crying like a baby, I believe, and he saw the tears, and—and—they served better than any words I could have uttered to express what I felt.

“I found my friend in the veranda, where I had left him. He began, of course, to question me, but my answers were short and ungracious enough, considering the relations in which we stood to each other at the time. However, after a few minutes hard riding, I found myself in a condition to relate the main points of what had occurred. The Capitan Pablo Fernandez—that was my friend’s name—expressed a sort of qualified approval of the course I had followed. ‘The affair must stand over,’ he said, ‘for the present!’ I did not pursue the subject, and we shortly

arrived at our quarters, where we separated. Then I went straight to Marston, and told him all about my morning's work. He shook his head over the first part of my story, but long before I came to the end, I saw that our friendship was on a firmer basis, if possible, than it had yet been; the grasp of his hand told me that—there was no qualification or proviso there!

"Things now went on pretty quietly for about a twelve-month. At the end of that time, the regiment being now equal in discipline to any in the service, Marston's toil and assiduity met with the usual acknowledgment. The reins of government changed hands, and with the new administration came a new commandant to the Murcian Cuirassiers—our regiment! I was to retain my position, if I thought fit; Marston—they had the assurance to intimate to *him*, that his position had been a temporary one, and to offer him the grade next *beneath* that he had hitherto held—the second place in a regiment which he himself had formed out of a rabble. And who or what was this new colonel under whom it was proposed to him to serve? A stripling of some four-and-twenty years of age; service he had seen none; a relative and creature of the new minister for war. It was important, said they—God save the mark!—that the command of regiments should be vested in the aristocracy of the nation. *Vaya! Cosas de España!* I need scarcely say, we treated their miserable offers with the contempt they deserved. *Me*, they condescended to cajole, wherein they lost their labour. Off we went, leaving the corps in a state of

incipient mutiny, for Marston—Don Gilberto—was idolised. *I* was tolerably well liked; and as soon as they became aware of the treatment we had received, all their acquired habits of discipline seemed in danger of being cast to the winds. How the young gentleman at their head succeeded in bringing them to a proper sense of their duty and his merits, I cannot say.

“Marston and I travelled direct to Cadiz, where we remained a few days, and then took ship for England. We did not stay long at home, however. Our next move was westward; we went to Mexico, and served in a regiment of lancers against the Yankees. We saw reason to change sides afterwards. What do you think of that? We were in no way bound to the brave Mejicanos, you know, beyond the period for which we took service. I assure you I sliced up more than one of my former corps in the way of business at a subsequent period, though it was no easy matter getting at them, for *sauve qui peut!* as I well knew, was their motto in all cases of attempted close quarters. By the way, Marston and I, while with them, were both of us in imminent peril at times, from pure shame, which prevented our joining in the flight of our brave squadrons.

“At last, after Marston had been shot through the neck and shoulder, and *I* only escaped through sheer toughness of muscle, from being cut in small sections, we took advantage of a general cessation of hostilities, to tender our resignations. (Ha! just in time—there go three bells—time to dress, as you call it, for dinner. I must summarise the

remainder of my sketch.) We served afterwards in various quarters of the globe—in Italy, in Hungary with Görgey, in Schleswig-Holstein, in Persia, had divers degrees of luck, and let blood at divers times, as usual, both as surgeon and patient; and here we are, still ready for the battle of life, wherever there is a place for us to fall in to the ranks. One of us will go to the field some morning, and remain there when the armies separate at nightfall; the other has a gentler fate waiting upon his will. He thinks he has been long wooing her to his arms. I know he has been blindly driving her away; but she will come home to him at last, and the evening of his days will be bright and calm!”

As the man-at-arms uttered the last sentence, he rose to his feet, and now stood silently looking over the bulwarks and across the blue waves. Wilmot was about to speak, but, glancing at his companion's face, he saw something there which hushed the accents on his tongue, for it was evident that the gaze thus fixed on the watery horizon was vacant, and that the gazer's mental vision found no limit there. So Frank only thought, and his meditations took somewhat of this shape.

“And some people—the Pharisees of our times—would judge this man; stamp him an outcast from the pale of religion, a stranger to his Redeemer. Yet I would rather stand humbly remote with this publican than sit in the high places of the synagogue with those who thank Heaven they are not as he is.”

A gentleman now emerged from the cabin hatchway

who was not troubled either with acute perception or delicate scruples.

"Three-halfpence for your thoughts, Captain Thornfield," quoth Captain William Graves; "and that is fifty per cent. above the market price, as established by usage."

"They are not worth the money to you, Captain Graves," replied the object of his remark, turning slowly towards him, with something like a smile on his lip. "Thoughts! What should you do with thought? You have got on comfortably enough for thirty years, roughly calculated, without any such drawback to condition. Take my advice, captain—pursue the even tenor of your way, and let thought alone."

"D——d odd fish that!" said Graves, without the least ill-humour, however, as he followed the man-at-arms with his eyes.

"Very," quoth Francis Wilmot.

The whole party now assembled on deck, for the purpose, according to Gormansby, of getting a mouthful of fresh air previous to sitting down to dinner. This was essential, for there was a leg of English mutton in a forward state; and this, also according to the above authority, was "not a thing to be trifled with."

A very cheerful little dinner-party it was when the viands had been borne in high procession along the deck from the caboose half-an-hour afterwards. Wine of divers sorts was produced without stint, and freely partaken of by some of the party. Marston and Thornfield were hope-

lessly abstemious; Frank Wilmot, since the occurrence related a few chapters back, had nearly emulated them in this particular; but Gormansby indulged in what he called "a rough sufficiency," always having due regard to the sanctity of the digestive organs; while Captain Graves took what would in most circles be fairly denominated too much. But the gallant captain was a gentleman, so called, even in his excesses, and was never offensive, though sometimes a bore.

The *Bittern* came to anchor off the long Mole, which stretches out into the bay from the strand of Malaga, just as the sun dipped beneath the western horizon, and almost immediately a thousand lights sprung at once into existence, from the house windows on shore, and the decks of anchored *feluccas* lying in the bay. There was no trouble as to papers, &c., with the officials of the port, for the *Bittern* carried the flag of the royal yacht squadron, but it was pronounced too late to go ashore that night; so, after a cheerful evening spent on deck with cigars, claret-cup, and light conversation, not unpleasantly broken by song of boatman and distant thrum of guitar, the crew and passengers of the little vessel resigned themselves to repose.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MALAGA.

AT about daybreak, the report of a gun interwove itself with, rather than broke Wilmot's slumbers. Murmuring something about "leave from parade," he turned over on the other side, and his senses were once more steeped in oblivion. It was broad daylight when, at length, he emerged from the cabin, and breathed, delighted, the balmy, crisp freshness of the morning.

Sunlight, vivid and intense, gilt the roofs of the tall dingy houses along the strand, danced on the ripples which splashed against the shining black sides of the yacht, and lit up, with wavering sparkle, the glazed chaco and polished musket-barrel of the Spanish sentry, who peered at them from over the low parapet of the Mole-head. Squadrons of orange-peel and sea-weed bobbed past on the current, while shore boats, painted in gaudy colours, and impelled by swarthy, red-sashed oarsmen, plied in the vicinity of the *Bittern*, and in that of a little steamer lying at anchor within hail. This vessel had just arrived from Algesiras, with passengers and divers freight, among the former being many of Wilmot's comrades from Gibraltar, some of whom were, at the present moment, looking over



the steamer's bulwarks, and now sent a cheer of greeting across the wave. Wilmot recognised the familiar features of Woodcock, (slightly flushed, as usual, even at this early hour,) O'Shane, the assistant-surgeon, who, even while the victim of a misunderstanding with the mess president, could generally compass the wherewithal for a party of pleasure, Thewes of the Grenadier company, Sinnewes of the Light Infantry, and others on whose appellations and attributes it is unnecessary to enlarge.

"Ahoy, there!" came on the breeze, through the improvised speaking-trumpet of a hand on each side of the questioner's mouth. "Will you go ashore by and by, and see about tickets?"

"Got them—all right—but will join you, with pleasure, for a la—ark!" was the answer similarly conveyed to the party on board the steamer.

"The devil you will!" interpolated Captain Graves, who now made his appearance from below. "What! Go ashore when one of Gormansby's fellows will do everything we want. Are you a salamander?"

"My dear fellow, of course I shall. I never saw Malaga before; and I think you said *you* never had?" quoth Frank, in some amaze.

"No; but I was in Seville last year; and they're all much alike," quoth Captain Graves. "But I shall go ashore in the evening, when it's cooler, and get an ice, perhaps."

"Every one to his taste," returned Wilmot, somewhat contemptuously. "I shall be off the instant I've got some

breakfast, and see all that's to be seen. Remember, we are booked for the bull ring during the whole of the next three days, and should make the best use we can of the present."

"So I intend," quoth the captain, stretching himself on a bench, and selecting a cigarette, "as I'm doing now, old fellow. And if Gormansby don't see me through it, I'm a Dutchman, or anything you like to call me."

"I call you a devilish good fellow," responded the amused Wilmot, "and safe from palpitation of the heart, unless it comes through derangement of the liver—but, hallo! look here—Marston and Thornfield in the cutter's dingy, isn't it?—at what a pace Thornfield makes her spin through the water!"

"Yes, he's one of your violent characters," replied Graves, in a tone of languid deprecation—"where's the sense of introducing gymnastics into the ordinary avocations of civilised existence? He makes me shudder sometimes, that fellow, when he gets excited about some trifle."

"I don't doubt it—but come—I see they've got fresh bread and fish, and all sorts of commissariat luxuries—my blessing upon them; and here comes Gormansby—and lo! from the galley is borne the steaming coffee-pot—to breakfast, to breakfast!—you'll rouse yourself for *that*, Graves, I know."

"No occasion to make one swing down the cuddy stairs, however," grumbled the latter, slowly following in the wake of the others; Marston and Thornfield, having arrived on deck with one of the crew behind them bearing

the products of their early visit ashore. The breakfast to which they now sat down was a good one; tea, coffee, and chocolate; fresh fish, (delicious red mullet;) bread of divers sorts, cutlets, eggs, and a glass of cool Bordeaux for such of the party as affected that beverage; having recorded which, we pass to other matters.

Gormansby would not have relinquished his customary semi-recumbent position immediately after breakfast, were it to have witnessed a combat of antediluvian monsters; Graves has just explained *his* views on that head; and Marston and Thornfield, besides being intimately acquainted with the features of the place, had already enjoyed an excursion ashore in the cool of the morning; therefore Captain Francis Wilmot found himself under the necessity of proceeding thither alone. Being joined, however, on the beach by a hilarious party from the steamer, they went off together in such spirits as youth and health and novelty can impart, to make a tour of the city and its environs. We shall not here dilate on the features of Malaga. Having glanced at the handsome Alameda, (or public promenade,) with its quadruple row of trees, and on each side, running east and west, an imposing front of buildings, more French than Spanish in the order of their architecture; the dazzling white walls of the citadel rising gorgeous in the sunshine above an irregular mass of roofs towards the east; and the suburbs, like all Spanish suburbs, narrow, tortuous, and difficult for English footsteps to tread, as well as unsavory to English nostril, we have completed a rough sketch of the city, definite enough for the purposes of our narrative.

Of course, a *soi-disant* "guide" at once attached himself to the party, will they nill they, trusting probably to the chance of something turning up in the course of their ramble which might bring his services into requisition, and perseveringly dogging their footsteps, heedless of the unanimous and most explicit avowal of distaste for his society, which was, at intervals, reiterated with fierce irony by the *officiales Ingleses*. Sauntering along in this way, they came to the English cemetery, which lies on the outskirts of the town, near the seaside, and is pretty and cheerful, being well cared for, and ornamented with cypress and other less mournful-looking evergreen shrubs. The scene might have suggested a certain train of thought to an imaginative individual. Few of our present party were of this class, but there were one or two through whose minds something like the following may have passed, vague and undefined, with reference to their native land.

Strange nation! strange in its traditions—its gigantic power—its apparent mighty mission! And stranger still in the devious course through which that mission seeks accomplishment. Behold, in this far-off country, girt in by superstition—not denied the light, but ever seeking to distort to the vision of her sons the view that light unveils—one spot is claimed, and grudgingly accorded, as a resting-place to those by whose efforts at last the light shall be made to shine pure and perfect—a sacred refuge for Britain's heretic children—one fresh green oasis in the arid desert of priestcraft!

No trunk of superstition and ignorance so cross-grained, gnarled, and knotted, but the thin end of the wedge there finds a lodgment. Where is the mallet and the nervous arm that should drive the implement home, and rend the log to fragments? The recognition and reception of God's work as paramount on earth! Behold, this favoured people—fearfully favoured, as those to whom the words are spoken, "I give to your charge my pastures: feed and tend my sheep"—behold this people following out their mission further still, into the realms of very blindness and pagan idol worship. How have they sped? Can God's cause halt in the carrying through? And wherefore? Because, like the hag-born son of Sycorax and his guilty band, we stop upon the threshold of our enterprise to clutch the tinselled dross hung round by Satan; because the people, over whom our earthly weapons have been blessed with easy conquest—half wavering—led by twos and threes, even by the flickering gleam of the half-fed lamp held forth to guide their hesitating footsteps—they halt upon the threshold of our temples, and whisper, each one to his neighbour—"Pause! Can this be the altar of the one true God? This people, who scarce beckon us to worship with them,—the religion which flows coldly from their lips is 'Christ,'—but the God who sits enshrined in the warm centre of their hearts is—GOLD!"

Their wanderings were now brought to a close by a declaration from one of the party—a certain Lieutenant Augustus Fastman (of the Royal County Bingo)—that

"he had had enough of it—the dust was worse than Gibraltar, and the place altogether a humbug."

"But I'll tell you what," suggested that gentleman, who was young in years, but tolerably ripe as regarded other matters, "let's dine at the hotel on the Alameda, and then start for a lark about the town, and see what's what. Eh, Wilmot? Gormansby will have special woodcocks, or partridges, or something, and will think you mad—let him—torpid old muff!—and you join us for a quiet spree!"

"Gormansby," said Frank, "will neither wait dinner, nor break his heart about my non-appearance; I—hum—I think I will dine ashore; and if I can't manage to send a message on board, it don't signify—they won't set me down as murdered or gone astray."

"I'm not sure about the latter," grinned Fastman; "but I see by Thewes's face he won't make one of us, so he can tell the yacht people to leave the door on the latch, and—eh!—yes, by Jove! we'll charter this vagabond that's been dogging us about all day to shew us what's to be seen after dark."

"You're a 'cute hand at physiognomies, Augustus," quoth Lieutenant Thewes, very coolly. He was a big Yorkshireman, of much dull good nature, and implicit rectitude. "I do decline *in toto* a cruise on board the raking craft *Skylark*, Fastman master; and I don't think your proposed pilot mends the matter a bit. 'Ware shoals! Wilmot—I fancy I can hear the breakers now!"

A brief further discussion ended in Frank's walking off with the shore dining party to the English hotel, and

Lieutenant Thewes going on board the *Bittern* to announce the defection of the former, and to fish for an invitation to fill his place—in which latter enterprise he was successful.

During the time dinner was being discussed in the hotel, the individual who had, in the early part of the day, proffered his services as guide, never for a moment lost quest of them; and when—having ministered to the inward man, after the true British fashion, washing down an indifferent meal with a full amount of the fieriest wines that could be procured,—they emerged from the dining apartment into the *patio*, or court-yard, of the hotel, there—seated after the fashion, though much unlike our notions, of a patriarch of old, under the shadow of the fig-trees, grave and silent, ruminating, but ever-watchful, and now confident of employ, *for the Ingleses had dined*—sat, with protruding, shapeless lips, and close-set villainous eyes, that hang-dog-looking vagabond.

The bulk of the party,—talking loudly, and chorusing with laughter, somewhat wildly, flashes of humour, which, to a cool listener, might have seemed barely worthy such recognition,—after a turn or two amongst the sombre groups which now studded the dim area of the promenade, seated themselves on a bench for the purpose of observing the scene at leisure. There was a full sprinkling of well-dressed people of both sexes—no lack of beauty, probably, could the dark folds of the lace mantillas have been penetrated by the gaze—certainly no lack of grace, for the Spanish lady, and not of the higher class alone, stands

pre-eminent for grace and dignity of carriage and demeanour amongst the fair of Europe. A stranger to the country, having haply fed his imagination with visions of the quaint and picturesque costumes of ancient Spain—the Spain of Cervantes—would have been disappointed. The language, the features, (arched brow, curved lip, and flashing eye,) were Spanish; the dress, and much of the demeanour, those of the neighbouring land—that north of the Pyrenees—to which, it might have been supposed, the traditions of this people should have handed down but little of reverence or affection. It was now nearly dark, and the glowing ends of cigarettes flashed everywhere through the semi-obscurity of the starlit night, like innumerable fire-flies. Wilmot really enjoyed the scene, and would have been well-pleased to have fed his eye and fancy with its charms for some further space; but there were more restless, as well as more *blasé* spirits among those with whom he had cast his lot for the evening.

“Where the deuce is that fellow Fastman?” growled Captain Sinnewes. This officer was no bad specimen of a light-infantry man; that is, he was broad in the shoulder and thin in the flank, was well set on his pins, and possessed a somewhat grotesque countenance half hidden by enormous brown whiskers.

“I saw him deep in a confab with that ill-looking dog in the court of the hotel,” said Wagtayle. “Repton of the Artillery was with him, and the trio seemed to be after no good.”

“They might have given us the option of cutting in,



however," said the light-infantry leader, discontentedly. "Fastman is by way of knowing all about the place; but it's just like him to inveigle a lot of fellows into joining him for an evening's diversion, and then give them the dodge, as soon as anything turns up in which he don't want their company."

"What's the row?" suddenly demanded the very gentleman in question, who had come up behind them during the above speech, and now, placing a hand on a shoulder each of Sinnewes and Wilmot, swung himself over the back of the bench into a place between them. "I say," continued he, not waiting for an answer to his question, being indeed quite accustomed to such remarks on his behaviour—"I say, now, Sinnewes and Wilmot—who else is here?—Wagtayle—if you're up to a bit of real fun, say the word."

"What is it?" asked Wagtayle, dubiously.

"Your bits of fun demand a certain amount of previous inquiry, my lad," quoth Sinnewes, rather inconsistently.

"Being generally entertainment for one, and the bill for the lookers on," continued Wagtayle.

"Bill be hanged!—it's fun for the million," said the unruffled object of suspicion; "all kinds of larks—gipsies, the *bolero*, the old Ronda lot, in fact, at a *posada* in the back slums; and I've got a chap here who'll shew us the way as soon as we like to start—not five minutes' walk—come—*vamos!*—what's the odds as long's you're happy!"

After some discussion, and a slight difference of opinion, what scruples there were among the members of the party

were either dispelled or overruled, and, preceded by the sinister-looking rascal above mentioned, they, in comparative silence, as enjoined by that worthy, threaded some of the narrow streets which diverge from the precincts of the Alameda towards the north and east.

"Best not too much speak loud," intimated the respectable personage in front, in his peculiar idiom. Alas! it is a suggestive fact, that that section alone of the lower classes in this, as in other countries, whose degrading occupation it is to minister to the behests of idleness and vice, has acquired a partial smattering of the English tongue.

Those who now followed him had sense enough to recognise the folly of transgressing the admonition thus conveyed; and Mr Fastman's love of "spree," and general recklessness of temperament were at all times best kept in check by considerations of personal risk.

After thus stealing along through gradually-narrowing by-lanes, for certainly much more than the time named by the latter officer, the confused strumming sound of more than one guitar played in concert, and the click-clack of castanets made themselves heard some way in advance. The tinkling of stray instruments, which had met the ears of our party at divers points of their progress hitherward, had been in most instances accompanied by the drawling notes of the human voice, but this seemed to be in different measure, and to be broken at intervals by sounds of applause, as though dancing to its strains were going forward at the same time. Turning a corner abruptly, they found themselves almost within the doorway of a building,

from the ground apartment of which these mixed sounds proceeded.

It was a large rambling structure, though only of one story and a sort of attic, and beyond, as far as they could make out in the dim starlight, as well as by the ruddy glare which streamed from the doorway, the adjacent houses became straggling and irregular, as though the lane which they formed opened out, at no great distance off, upon the surrounding fields. They could, in fact, make out the dim outline of aloe and cactus plants immediately beyond where they were standing, these forming a sort of rugged hedge. Their attention, however, was at present riveted on the scene within doors.

A wide low-roofed apartment, lighted, or half-lighted, by sundry oil-cressets hung from the rafters, and affixed to the dingy clay-coloured walls; a crowd of some thirty or forty human beings of either sex, dressed chiefly as Spaniards of the lower class, seated in a sort of irregular circle on benches, bales of what appeared to be merchandise, and pack-saddles; rude tables covered with drinking vessels of divers sorts, and an inner apartment, evidently, from the "chumping" sound of cattle at their food, and now and again the clash of an iron-shod hoof upon the stones, devoted to the purposes of a stable—such constituted the *coup d'œil* of the scene upon which our friends now entered. While they were gathering in these and other details with curious eyes, the guide, approaching a corpulent middle-aged man, in his shirt sleeves, which were

rolled half-way up from the elbow to the shoulder, held a whispered colloquy for about a couple of minutes.

The reception of his communication was not what could be called exactly cordial. A good deal of grunting, and shaking of the head and fat forefinger took place, but the discussion ended, nevertheless, in a sort of grumbling assent to the admission of the *Inglese*s as spectators of what was going on, on the express understanding that he, Jose Zantero, proprietor of the *posada*, washed his hands of all evil consequences which might ensue. This being conveyed to the party by the guide, in a hurried whisper, and an injunction as to discretion being briefly given and impatiently received, they advanced into the apartment, and prepared to make themselves at home, as the youthful and lately-fed British warrior is wont to do.

Their first regards were naturally bestowed upon the surrounding company. Of these the greater proportion were men dressed after the country fashion, chiefly wearing the coarse brown jacket, embroidered on the back with a rude floral device, slung over one shoulder, and the invariable *papelito* protruding from beneath the dark moustache; but there were others, and most of the female sex there present were of this latter class, whose dress and features betokened a different race.

The women in question were attired in a costume rarely displayed on the persons of the sober-minded *paysanas* of Spain. There was a prevalence of bright and gaudy colouring, and even somewhat of tinsel decoration, not usually seen about the costume of the above. The

dark olive complexions, also; the swarthy rolling eyeballs and gleaming teeth were not exactly similar to those of the country people around. They were, in short, *Gitanas*, or *Zingari*—that strange vagabond race, inhabitants of no fixed region, but partaking more or less of the general traits and manners of that particular nation which, from choice or necessity, they had adopted as a residence. Their customs, however, among themselves—their dialect, under similar circumstances, and their religion—if religion it could be called—were all their own.

They appeared, on the present occasion, to be under the leadership or control of one individual, a tall, sinewy, powerful man of middle age, whose dress was of rather finer materials than the rest, as well as more subdued in colour, and whose features, not bad in themselves, nor wearing any expression worse than that of astuteness, were shaded by a broad-leaved, low-crowned hat; a head-dress unusual among the peasants of Spain. These generally affect the little jaunty *sombrero*, with smart tufts attached to its crown and upturned brim, and placed rakishly on one side of the close-cropped bullet head.

The Spaniards did not seem inclined to fraternise with the new-comers, and darted glances in their direction which by no means symbolised love; but the gipsies, on the contrary, seemed unanimously to hail their advent with pleasure, and gradually edged themselves towards the corner where they had bestowed themselves. The tall individual above alluded to, crossed the floor at once, and addressed himself, with a bow, and courteous wave of the delicate,

though swarthy and muscular, hand to Frank Wilmot, who stood nearest him.

"*Oficiales de Gibraltar?*" he began, in a tone of polite inquiry.

"*Si; pero—no intiendo Espagnol—that is—no bastante para hablar,*" stammered Frank.

"Ah!" said the gipsy, "it shall not matter—I speak *Ingles*—I stay in Gibraltar once short time—but I do not like your regulation—too dam strict. *Pues*, I meet *oficiales* at Ronda last time fair; ah! one so ver good man, Don Morley—you know Don Morley, señor?"

"Very well indeed; he commands my regiment, and is, as you say, a very good man."

"Señor," said the gipsy, laying his hand on his heart, and bowing, as though in homage to the absent object of his esteem, "Don Morley is a gentleman. Don Morley has been kind to me and to my people, and Ramon Pequinez will shew, when occasion shall come, that he does not forget."

"Will you drink a glass of *vino* to his health?" asked Frank, for refreshments had been profusely ordered for the general behoof of the company, and now stood on the rude table by his side.

"I will—the good Don—and to yours, joven señor. *Salud, caballero!* And now I will give the señor *oficial* one bit of advice—Keep ver quiet, and do not stay long. No one here now who will do you harm, but—by and by those may come who will not be safe to meddle with, nor perhaps ver well pleased to see the señores *Ingleses* here."

In the meantime, Wilmot's brother-soldiers were occupying themselves with the other gipsies, chiefly the female portion of them, who, on their part, were accepting, with much grotesque affectation of modest reluctance, divers sips of the generous fluid at hand, and chorusing with shouts of merriment the attempts, more or less successful, made by their new cavaliers to compliment them in the Spanish tongue. The Spaniards, however, who had kept morosely aloof from all overtures of boon companionship, now grew impatient of an entertainment in which they were but sleeping partners.

"The dance!—the dance!" became the cry.

Obedient at last to the reiterated demand, two couples took their places in the middle of the earthen floor; the musicians, also four in number, seized their instruments; and the quaint *bolero*, exaggerated to suit the tastes of the audience proper—the Spaniards—was tripped through to the murmured applause or otherwise of the standers-by. This was succeeded by what was more to the general taste still—the wildly-fantastic *tarantella*, its whirling mazes drawing down enthusiastic plaudits from the delighted *Inglese*s. Just as the tambourines were thrown up with a parting clash, to signify the end of the figure, a youngish *Zingari* female, of considerably attractive features, in spite of the wild confusion of her elf-locks, and the absence of anything like timidity from her glance and gesture, suddenly turned from her partner with an abrupt *pirouette*, and, feigning exhaustion from her exertions, whirled herself right in front of where

Frank Wilmot was sitting, and flung herself upon the bench by his side.

"*Ay de mi, que calore!*" sighed she. "*Un pocito de vino, caballero, por Dios!*"

Frank hastened, with all politeness, albeit confused by the melting languor of the lady's glance, (his heart being, as we know, cased in triple steel,) to supply her wants.

"*Bonito!*" whispered the bashful fair one, as she raised the goblet to her ruddy full lips. "You shall be my own *chulo*; will you not, joven, with the fair curls and blue eyes?"

As the lady spoke entirely in the Spanish tongue, (although we translate the most part of her conversation for our own convenience, and that of the reader,) Frank had a very limited notion of her meaning. He could not but be aware, however, that her address was couched in complimentary strain, so he endeavoured, as in duty bound, to express his sense of the honour.

"Ah! well, well! you are cold, cold—*frio, frio*—like all English," continued she, smoothing with dark fingers her darker tresses; "but I know—the gipsy can read the heart through the eyes—there is some one left at home who has stolen all the fire from your bosom—*maldita!* Listen!—the *Zingari* in your country profess to tell the future of him whose palm they look upon—do they not? Those here can as well—you shall see. Give me your hand—piff! do not be so cold—*madré, que blanco!* Shall I tell your fortune, *joven de mi alma?*"

Frank, divining her meaning from her action, laugh-



ingly assented, though he began to find the entertainment rather a bore.

"*Bueno!*—it is not difficult—I can read as in a book here—a young *señorita*—very young—younger than the *señor* himself, though not much," said she, looking keenly in his face, over which a half-frown began to steal, which, however, only encouraged the gipsy to proceed—"the young *señorita* sits thinking of what was said to her at parting, and blesses in her heart the moon and stars that are shining on his head in a far country, as they are doing through the chamber window on her own. She knows that his heart is hers, for he has told her so—perhaps she is not quite certain about her own." (Frank, who understood this last phrase, started.) "And there is another cavalier—older, and always at hand—her father likes him." (Here Frank, thoroughly amazed, tugged violently at his hand; but the gipsy, who was struggling with suppressed laughter, held it tight.) "Be patient, young *señor*; let me look further—perhaps"——

What further might have met the young gentleman's ears, and whether it might have been of a soothing tendency or the reverse, we cannot tell, for at this moment the tall gipsy, passing hastily behind the bench where they sat, muttered harshly in the woman's ear—

"*Guarda!*—fool!—*El Cuchillero!*"

The gipsy woman sprung from her seat as if a shot had struck her. Wilmot, looking round in surprise, saw that her countenance, which had been flushed with merriment, was now as pale as death. Impelled by curiosity, or by

the spirit of contradiction, he stretched forth his arm, as she stood up to leave him, and seizing her swarthy fingers in his turn, demanded, in broken Spanish, "what was wrong, and wherefore she did not finish her sketch of his future?"

With a convulsive twitch, she released her hand from his, and with a muttered "Go! if you are not mad," vanished from his side.

At this moment Frank became aware that two individuals had added themselves to the party. There was nothing very remarkable in this, but there assuredly was in the ferocious scowl with which one of these was surveying the young officer himself. The man in question, who was apparently about the middle age, was dressed in a manner rather superior to the country people round, though there was nothing in his features or bearing to distinguish him favourably from them, but the reverse. The customary small *sombrero*, surmounting a bright scarlet kerchief, crowned his animal-looking bullet-shaped head, the hair on which was longer than was usual and as black as coal; thick shaggy eyebrows bordered the caverns within which glowed a pair of savagely-gleaming eyes, and his full lips were parted with a sort of sneer, which boded anything but good to the object of his regards. His shirt-collar was folded back from his brawny throat, beneath which met a pair of bushy whiskers, a little grizzled; and his enormous chest and muscularly-developed limbs betokened the possession of bodily strength far beyond man's average. Altogether, it was uncomfort-

able (as Frank Wilmot could not help reflecting) to find one's-self exposed to so decidedly hostile glances in such a place from such a personage.

Looking round, however, and seeing his comrades close at hand, and deep in a seemingly amicable conclave with others of the company, the captain became somewhat reassured, but he could not help again experiencing an uneasy sensation, not unmixed with indignation, when he saw his late companion, the gipsy girl, upon her timidly approaching the new-comer, and attempting to address some words to him, savagely repulsed with a backward motion of the hand, which, while apparently costing the man no effort, was sufficiently forcible to make its recipient stagger back a few paces. It did not mend matters, as regarded the agreeability of the situation, when the former, as if in pursuance of some resolution just formed, now abruptly crossed the floor of the apartment, and planted himself, with a force which made the crazy boards creak again, on the very seat which the lady had just vacated.

We have said the new-comers were two; the second, being little inferior in importance to the first, also deserves some special notice. He was above the middle height, lean and wiry, apparently about the same time of life as his companion; but his sallow visage, seamed by harsh lines in every direction, and almost devoid of fleshy substance, was of that order which affords little clue to the owner's exact age. His eyebrows were black, straight, and meeting together over the nose, and his deep-set small gray eyes had a cruel, cunning expression in them, like those of

a cat. He wore a dark-brown *grego* or mantle, and on his head a peculiar-looking hat, low-crowned, like that of the gipsy, but the wide, circular brim was stiff and flat, and his dark, wiry locks were gathered behind into a sort of club. This, as the whispers of those present speedily revealed to the unenlightened, was the *picador* Juan Diez, and his comrade first described no other than Pepe Garcia, the *matador*, surnamed *El Cuchillero*, which latter had lately appeared as a star in the bull-ring, the former having been long celebrated in his department among the *toreros* of Spain.

The *picador*, with arms folded, leaned against the wall nearly opposite Frank and the other, and smoked silently, keeping watch with a kind of ugly sneer on the motions of his comrade, and replying with a nod, a word, or a gesture of the hand to the compliments or hospitable overtures of his deferential compatriots. *El Cuchillero*, in the meantime, sat staring insolently into Frank Wilmot's countenance, and apparently revolving in his mind how he should open a conversation of no very amicable tendency. Frank might, perhaps, have attempted to say something conciliatory had his knowledge of the language permitted him, but there was something in the murderous gaze of the *torero* which drove from his head the little he possessed of its conventional phrases of courtesy; so he sat still, watching for an opportunity of leaving this unpleasant vicinity, which might obviate the appearance of downright flight. The tall gipsy, Pequinez, while this was passing, (it occupied much less time in action than it has in description,)

after a scarcely noticeable exchange of signals with some of his band, took up a position close to the door, which was flanked by the closed wooden shutters of a large square unglazed aperture by way of window. Frank's brother-officers pursued their amusement, exchanging badinage with the gipsy women, and apparently unconscious that anything extraordinary impended, though several of the latter began to get restless and uneasy. Frank's late companion, the fortune-teller, had disappeared.

El Cuchillero at length seemed to have formed his plans. "*Salud, señorito,*" said he, addressing Frank in tones of mocking kindness, intended as an imitation of the manner in which one speaks to a child, and raising to his lips a glass containing *aguardiente*; "*Salud, señorito mio—eh?*" continued the man, bending forward, and affecting to peer beneath his hand into Frank's countenance. "Pardon—I mistake—*señorita*, I should say—ah! *vaya!*—*vaya!*—go home, go home, *señorita*, your *chulo* will be angry when he wakes from his *siesta*, and finds his clothes gone a-masquerading."

In translating these words we rob them of much of their insulting significance, nor can we do more than indicate the mocking irony of the ruffian's tone. As he finished his speech, however, Wilmot still remaining puzzled and mute, though his face glowed with indignation, the *torero* stretched forth one large, brown hand, and chucked the young man smartly under the chin.

The awakened lion was stirring and bristling beneath poor Frank's breastbone, but with an effort he controlled

himself still, and starting from his seat, endeavoured to join his comrades with the view of inducing them to quit the place. As he hastily moved forward with this intent, El Cuchillero extended his foot, and Frank, stumbling a pace or two, measured his length on the clay floor. Flesh and blood could stand it no longer; scrambling to his feet, his hands clenched, teeth set, and face crimson with shame and fury, while his brother-officers gazed in speechless astonishment at the scene, he dashed at the bull-fighter, who was standing grinning with his arms akimbo, and struck him a blow full on his swarthy visage, which precipitated him backwards over the bench on which they had been sitting. With a hoarse, stifled scream, resembling the cry of a wild beast, the *matador*, springing to his feet, tore the embroidered jacket from his brawny shoulders, and dashed it into the centre of a group of spectators, who now hurriedly gathered round. They bore back, as if in awe of the infuriated savage, and he and the young officer stood glaring upon each other for a moment face to face.

Here we are concerned to record the fact that Messrs Fastman and Repton, the instant they realised the idea of danger being in the wind, edged themselves towards the door of the house, and aided by the gipsy leader, who still remained sentinel upon it, fairly betook themselves to the street, where (to use their own subsequent expression) they "cut like lamplighters."

Honest Sinnewes, being a man of very different metal, seeing his friend and brother-officer in danger, and exposed

to what he considered unfair odds, at once "cleared for action," like a true-hearted British soldier as he was.

"No, by G—!" roared he, flinging those who stood between him and the two unequally-matched antagonists to the right and left, "that wont do, Mister——out of the way, Frank; he's fit to eat you, man, for his supper—let me forward, you there—now, what's your name—I'm your man, if you're bent on a"——

Before he could get out another word of his defiance, the *torero*, turning upon him, much like the animal by encountering which he earned his laurels and livelihood, with a hoarse execration, and a shout of "*Venga!*" threw himself upon his new opponent. All this took but a moment of time. There was a brief, desperate struggle, and poor Sinnewes found that he had reckoned without his host.

"Cut, Frank!" gasped he, in half-smothered accents, to his friend, who was now held back by some of the gipsies; "run for it, old fellow—while—you've a chance—never mind me,"—and the gallant officer's voice was entirely choked in the fierce grasp of Pepe Garcia, which it was beyond any effort on his part to remove.

Frank, struggling forward frantically to aid his comrade, found himself in the arms of Ramon Pequinez.

"This way, this way, young señor, *por Dios*—out of the house for your life—I will help the *Inglese*"——

"Help him now, first; do you think I will leave him so? quit my arms—quit them, man, I tell you"——

At this moment, however, Sinnewes, with a violent

wrench, as they reeled to and fro, getting one hand free, struck upwards, after a fashion taught him erstwhile by Mr Thomas Squares of England, and caught the bull-fighter a terrific blow, though at too short a distance to be effective, just beneath the chin. As it was, the burly ruffian staggered back, for a moment loosening his grasp, and that moment sufficed to save his exhausted antagonist. In one instant there was a rush made by a band of half-a-dozen gipsies between the two. Sinnewes was grappled by two or three more, and in a couple of seconds Wilmot and he, thrust anyhow through the window above mentioned, (for the *picador*, Juan Diez, having planted himself in front of the door, the gipsy chief, after a moment's consideration, dashed open the window shutters,) were out in the street, and flying for their lives, they scarcely knew whither. The other officers had been already expelled with like friendly violence. As for Fastman and Repton, they had been some time out of sight and hearing; Woodcock and Wagtayle waited in the street, till they saw Sinnewes and Wilmot fairly out of the house, and then sounded the *saue qui peut*!

"Don't let's part company, like a good fellow," gasped Sinnewes, who was somewhat the less speedy of the two, and was, besides, considerably "trashed" by his late exercise. Wilmot fairly and honestly responded to the appeal. Indeed, how could he have acted otherwise, if he had even had to carry on his back the man who had just stood voluntarily between him and deadly peril? Those two had not been hitherto particularly intimate, but Frank



never forgot that night's adventure, nor the generous unselfishness of his brother-officer. Who shall say that he has fully searched the heart of his fellow-man, without the aid of circumstance to sound its hidden depths?

The gipsy had shrieked after them a general injunction to keep to the left. Pursuing this direction, they could not tell how far, at last, with a devoutly-breathed "Thank Heaven!" they found themselves at a sudden turn brought full in view of the Alameda. How they blessed the twinkling lights, and revelled in the distant shimmer of the starlit sea!

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, Frank," quoth Graves, next morning, when they met on the clean white deck of the cutter, "when did you get on board last night, and how had you fared?"

"Oh, quite early—and all right," said Frank, answering both questions with assumed indifference.

"Quite early—that's according to the hours you're in the habit of keeping—it was past eleven; but 'all right?' Deceiver! You had no hat on, and had evidently run or fought for your life. I had turned in myself," continued Graves, "and I haven't seen Gormansby or the others; but Bill Abbot who was on watch told me, and he says you borrowed a tile from him before you would go down to the cuddy—that rough article you've got on now. O Frank, Frank! tell me your company, and I'll chalk out your evening's occupation for you, fast enough."

"Nonsense!—I tell you it was all correct," said Wilmot, testily.

"To be sure—who doubts it? Strictly according to rule—but how are you off for an appetite this morning?" pursued Graves, lighting a cigarette, with an amused countenance. "Ah! never mind; come down, and I'll find you a better headpiece than Bill's old Kilmarnock," and the good-natured captain refrained from further badinage, seeing that it was unwelcome, but remaining firmly persuaded that he could fill in the details of Frank's last night's history from his own experience on similar occasions.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE "CORRIDA DE TOROS."

BREAKFAST on board the yacht that morning was rather earlier than usual, in deference to the great event of the day—the sports of the bull-ring, which were to commence at about eleven o'clock; and it was considered advisable to take possession of the *palco* they had engaged in good time. Little notice, if any, was taken of Frank's proceedings the night before. Marston, he remembered, was reading in the cuddy, when he came down stairs, but a slight nod was the only notice he had taken at that time of his *entrée*, and he did not now appear to imagine that anything extraordinary had happened, conversing indifferently on general topics; Thornfield, Frank thought, looked queerly at him, with a half grin on his features, but he could not be certain what degree of significance was to be attributed to this; Graves had had his say; and Gormansby would not have troubled his head about the matter if he had pillaged a nunnery the night before and now carried the spoils about him. He would have listened with gratification, however, to a description of such an exploit, and would have slid out, along with the smoke of his

cigar, sundry atrocious dry facetiæ, in reference to the treatment which had been, might, or ought to have been accorded to the inmates of the establishment. A dreadful personage was Gormansby—a cynic, and a disbeliever in the bright side of female human nature; and he was an adept in that sort of bitter humour regarding it which made indifferent hearers of idle temperament laugh, and was calculated to send the teeth into the nether lip, and the finger nails into the palms of overhearing husbands, brothers, or *preux chevaliers*. But this, of course, could only happen by accident, for Gormansby was perfectly gentlemanly, as convention required, and would sooner have committed fifty licentious acts than one ill-bred one. In the course of the meal, however, or rather while they were smoking the calumet of peace afterwards on deck, Frank's reticence gave way, and he came out with the whole story of the last night's adventure, touching very lightly on that part of it which related to the fair *Zingari*, enlarging upon the valour of Sinnewes, and paying a tribute of thanks to the gipsy Pequinez. All his hearers were interested, more or less, in the recital.

"You have had a narrow escape, young man," said Colonel Marston, gravely; "the bull-fighters are a savage and reckless class, and would allow no fear of consequences to hold back their hands in a quarrel. Let me recommend you to content yourself with the daylight charms of Malaga in future."

"You need not distress yourself, Colonel Marston," quoth Frank, who did not see exactly why he should put

up with a lecture on the subject, from one whose acquaintance he had so recently formed.

"Well, don't be offended," returned the latter, laughing; "it is from my experience of Malaga that I talk—a dangerous place to use any freedoms in with the townspeople."

"El Cuchillero; he must be new to the ring," mused Thornfield. "I never heard the name, I think."

"He is a new hand," said Graves. "Haven't you read those bills that came aboard yesterday? He has only appeared five or six times, but is a stunning hand—quite a natural genius, they say. I was talking with a fellow in the *patio* of that hotel where we had coffee and ices," continued Graves, making quite a long speech for him—"an English chap—merchant or something; and he says this Cuchillero's an awful blackguard—that he got his sobriquet, by his own account, from stickin' a bull that had him down and his sword smashed to bits, and killin' him that way; but it's shrewdly suspected his talents in the stickin' line have not been confined to the cow department."

"He's first *spada*, to-day, is he not?"

"Yes, and is expected to take the shine out of the other chap—one Salamanquino—an older *torero*; but without the neatness of hand which has hoisted his mate at once to the top of the tree."

And now, time being up, the party from the yacht proceeded on shore and took their way leisurely towards the Plaza de Toros.

There was nothing demanding notice in the outside of

the Plaza. It presented a large, irregular extent of dead-wall, circular in form, with various outbuildings attached, and separate entrances for different classes, much in the style of our amphitheatres at home. There were also, close at hand, the stables of the wretched horses, which were to furnish their bloody quota to the amusements about to commence, and the wide barred portal through which, some eight-and-forty hours previously, unconscious of the gory ordeal which awaited them—one from which there was no loop-hole of escape—the hollow moaning, red glaring, surging crowd of savage bulls at dead of night had rushed upon their doom.

The *coup d'œil* which opened upon the gaze inside, at all events as regarded the more select portion of the building, lost something of the effect it might have borne, from the prevalence of the French garb, as before adverted to, over the picturesque costume of other days, still it was rich and striking—striking, alas! not so much from the grace and refinement of the numerous fair spectators, as from the fact that such grace and delicacy found a place there. Look at those forms and features with an attentive eye; select, if you will, any half-dozen countenances for critical analysis—you will find no cruelty—insensibility—no marks of half-trained intellect outwardly visible, to palliate or explain the owner's presence at such a scene. *Bastante!*—it is a much-vexed theme—*cosa de España!*

A military band, stationed in a space railed off for their reception, discourses most eloquent music. There is two much of the cymbal and the drum, but the effect is on the

whole good. But, *mira!* the assemblage beneath, abandoning wordy warfare (always good-humoured) with each other, rises *en masse*, and with voice and hand applauds the actors in the drama, as in procession they file round the arena. These are the *picadors*—the mounted *toreros*—lance in hand, the shaft of tough-grained wood, for that which is no child's play will speedily bend its fibres—and these in jackets of fancy hues, gaudy with embroidery of silk and silver, the light-heeled *chulos*, about a dozen in number; who, having filed round, dispose themselves in lounging attitudes of perfect indifference along the sides of the high wooden barrier. They are unarmed these last, and their active nether limbs are cased in stockings of silk, whereas the *picadors* are enveloped from knee to ankle in *horn-proof* leggings of stout padded leather. And they also range themselves close to the portal by which *el toro* will presently make his rush, and expectorate with calm complacency, listening to the still dropping fire of applause, while their miserable steeds droop patiently beneath them, or whisk some intrusive fly peevishly from their lean flanks.

The keys of the gates are now cast into the arena by the chief magistrate, from his *palco* in the centre of the gallery, in answer to the demand of the official whose duty it is to superintend this part of the proceedings. A grim hush of expectation—a whisper-broken silence succeeds the late uproar. Hark! the key grates in the lock—the gates creak on their hinges—on the wings of terror flies the porter; the shout of laughter which greets his *escalade* of the barrier is merged in one exulting roar—*el toro!*—*viva el toro!*—

and a 'sable-coated, swelling-crested savage of the Andalusian sierras dashes into the very centre of the ring. He has been baited into fury ere he left his den—a superfluous labour in this instance. One moment suffices to shew him where are “lives” on which “the gashes may do well.” Snorting smoke-wreaths from his dilated nostrils, with lowered shaggy front he flings himself upon the nearest *picador*. Can earthly prowess avail the man? Bah! it is Juan Diez. Dashed as he is, horse and rider, against the wooden barrier by the fury of the onset, the *torero's* nerve and science rise triumphant from the ordeal. Fixed in the tough hide of the bull's shoulder, the lance shaft bends again, but arm and weapon are true, and the baffled monster, flinging aloft his curled and matted crest with a moan of fury and bewilderment, passes on to the next. The same blind rush, with scarcely mitigated force, but with a different result. Lifted fairly off his legs, the wretched steed paws wildly for a moment in the air, and with his rider lies a helpless mass exposed to the rampant vengeance of the ruthless savage. Loud plaudits from the crowd—look to the ladies! For Heaven's sake, interpose yourselves, cavaliers, between their vision and the horrid work that now goes forward on the gory sawdust! Interpose? *En verdad, no señor*—are we so dead, think you, to all the rules of gallantry—we, the most punctilious gentlemen of Europe—pink of courtesy—descendants of the Cid? No, *caballeros Ingleses*, truly not so—we gaze upon the scene over their silky tresses, and they strain their eyeballs to lose no particle of the exciting business. Doubtless



small lover-like bets are made upon the very episode now in progress.

There is comparatively little danger, after all, to the *pica-dor*. A cloud of *chulos* now beset the bull, distracting his attention by their clamour and the flapping of their scarlet flags, even from the dear work of vengeance he has but half completed. The man retires unharmed, albeit limping somewhat bruised and shaken, from the arena for a time. The horse—there is no escape for him—such is not the programme. Look at him, as, dragged to his feet, he stands trembling and wavering on his nerveless limbs—for God's sake, lead him from our sight, and put him out of pain! Not so, once again, *señor caballero*—there is strength enough in him yet, half-disembowelled as you see him, and the blood-gouts welling from his heaving chest, as though a force-pump worked within,—there is strength enough remaining, *under an active rider*, for another course. See, he starts, wild with agony and blind with terror, from those who have lugged him to his feet, and totters to the centre of the ring. There, not many paces from him, still, with impotent rage, his horned foe pursues the mocking *chulos*. Turning from that fearful presence, he staggers once more for safety to his natural protector, man. Poor tortured slave of an inhuman master! even were he not insensible to thy mute appeal, he could not save thee now. But there is no such thought in his head—again, and once more again, urged by his armed heel, thy palpitating flank will meet the merciless horn, ere thy foe and fellow-victim spends his bootless fury on thy mutilated clay!

And this, people of Europe, is the national sport of holy Spain! "*Caramba!*" her indignant children may be supposed to interpolate, "you *Ingleses* do well to talk,—you, with your brutal prize-ring, and your cruel race-courses! What matter whether the steed sink beneath the horn of the *toro*, or broken-hearted at the end of a contest urged to death upon the sward!" But, brothers of Spain, even granting that the parallel holds good, which we hardly may, for the bright eyes of our gentle ones look not on the one, and with the other, such casualty as you name is the exception, not the rule,—but granting it were so, this is no question between nation and nation, but between man and his Creator. *His* eye, unheeded by which no sparrow falls to the ground,—how, think you, looks *that* down on yonder gory scene? He either approves or condemns; there is no place given to indifference in the Almighty bosom. Ponder it well, if ye be wise—if ye be men, with human hearts open to good impressions as to evil. Think to whom it must be that the exulting shouts with which ye hail these barbarous deeds *descend* as pleasing incense.

Pardon these digressions, gentle reader, and pass them over if they be wearisome, as is likely, or run counter to thine own opinions, which is possible. As regards the former contingency, we pray you to remark that they are brief; as regards the latter,—after all, without difference of opinion, argument cannot arise, and amicably-conducted argument is the salt of social existence. We will hear, then, when thou wilt, thy views on this as on other ques-

tions lightly touched upon in the course of our sketches, and we promise thee for them that courteous reception which now we ask at thy hands for our own.

The drama at length, per force, draws to a close as respects these, the first performers. A certain amount of butchery has to be gone through, (see programme of the day,) and the sun will not stand still even for this holy purpose. Cries from the lower benches—from the gods, who appropriately sit below—attest their impatience for the winding up,—the slaughter of the now-wearied wretch, that, with tongue protruding, red eye-balls glazed and dim, and soiled and dusty hide dabbled with crimson mud, stands motionless in a corner of the arena. He is deaf and blind to insult, callous to further tortures, excepting as testified by the shuddering quiver of the gashed skin, as the barbed dart of the *banderillero* from time to time still seeks to strike forth a spark of fury.

“*Viva! viva! viva El Cuchillero*” The latest and most renowned *matador* of Spain advances and makes his bow, not ungracefully for one of such bulk, in front of the *palco*, next to that occupied by the English officers, where sits the corpulent *alcalde*, great and serene, the arbiter of the lists. Strange *travestie* of the chivalrous displays of early times! Such has been for centuries the march of intellect in this haughty land. El Cuchillero was dressed magnificently in a short round jacket of light-green cloth, the hue of which was nearly lost in the mass of heavy gold embroidery which covered the front, shoulders, and back; a pink silk sash encircled his waist; stockings of pearl-gray

colour encased his brawny legs, meeting, below the knee, breeches somewhat darker in hue than the jacket; and thin shoes with large black rosettes completed his attire. His coal-black hair was gathered behind into a club and enclosed in a silken net; all which elaboration of attire made the sinister expression of his countenance only more repulsive, because more observable, than it might have been under ordinary circumstances.

Sinnewes, who was sitting in the front row, turned round and grinned at Frank Wilmot.

"Rather a teaser, ain't he?" asked the former gallant officer. "He sees us, Frank; I'm blowed if he don't. I caught his eye; and now he's looking at you as if he'd just like to have you down there. But, hallo! What the deuce is the matter with him? Look at him, Frank."

In very truth, the Cuchillero's demeanour at this moment was sufficiently remarkable. His eye, as Sinnewes had noticed, glanced rapidly over the members of their party with an observable heightening of his customary savage scowl; but all at once an expression of nothing less than intense bewilderment and even terror overspread his swarthy features. He faltered in the midst of a short speech he was commencing, addressed to the "noble spectators of the sports," and craving permission now to play the part allotted to him in the programme; dropped, with its point to the ground, the *spada*, which he had been gracefully waving, and stood mute, with his eyes fixed upon a spot just, as it appeared to Frank, over that young officer's head.

Turning hastily round, the latter encountered the strangely-altered glance of Basil Thornfield. He was sitting with his arms folded tightly across his chest, with a sort of smile, which Frank had rarely seen there, on his compressed lips, and a lurid light in his keen gray eyes which made them shine like live embers from beneath their pent-houses. As he met Frank's astonished glance, he smoothed his brow, as though by an effort, passed his broad hand rapidly once or twice over his flushed features, and spoke carelessly :

"A powerful brute, and a dangerous, I should say, to meet in a dark lane with doubloons in one's pocket and no revolver. But I doubt if he has nerve for the business he is about. Seems afraid of the *alcalde* ; and, I daresay, not without reason."

El Cuchillero had almost immediately, however, recovered himself. His temporary emotion must have been palpable to nearly every one, but it probably passed as the natural diffidence of "one unused to public speaking ;" and he tossed up his *montero* cap, and retired to take up his position for the finale, followed by universal plaudits. The last act of the drama proceeded.

This to us has always been the most melancholy as well as least morbidly exciting part of the tragedy as regards the fate of the bull. The unhappy animal, jaded, hopeless, and broken-spirited, is scarcely to be roused to active fury. At last, drawn forward pace by pace, he stands front to front with the *matador*, nearly in the centre of the arena. Hist ! *Mira !* he is roused—well-planted and strongly, brave

*banderillero*! An agonised toss of the head, an instantaneous lowering of the shaggy front, a pause, motionless as a statue. He is about to rush. Hah! a cloud of dust—the shining blade, lightly poised, point downwards, in the muscular fingers of the *matador* is sheathed like lightning between the bull's shoulders—a stumbling, rocking stagger forward; a stifled bellow; his dripping muzzle ploughs the surface of the arena—and his torments are at an end!

It were needless to follow the sports to their termination in detail. The sketch we have attempted to give may be accepted as a type of the whole. Five other bulls, more or less fierce and active, followed in the bloody footsteps of the first, and the features of the sport varied only according to the ferocity and endurance of the ill-starred animal. In one instance, the unhappy beast stalked leisurely into the arena, and, after gazing, bewildered, for a moment at the strange array, lay down, and, shaking his ears, seemed inclined to surrender his passive bulk to repose. His fate was but the more cruelly horrible. All ordinary means proving unequal to rousing him into measures of active vengeance, "fire" and "the dogs" were called for and produced. A sickening exhibition! Poor wretch, in other lands his honest front might have been scratched and patted by childish hands, and hung perchance with garlands of summer blossoms. Here—torn, burnt, and gory, the crackling fireworks and savage hounds distract with anguish and terror that heart in which no fury answers even to their call. Hark to the howling storm of execration on "the coward!" The

coward—O brave descendants of Rodrigo Diaz—pah ! it is useless—no sport to be expected here. The *matador*, having exhausted all *his* efforts, bows with contemptuous shrug to the audience, and retires to the side of the ring. Worn out with pain and fright, the bewildered brute lies down once more ; a mute declaration of non-resistance, and appeal for mercy. *Bueno !*—he shall have it—a man approaches with bared arm and 'gleaming stiletto—one pause for aim—no cause for nervousness here—a blow—the shaggy head is tossed convulsively, the recumbent mass half rises, staggers forward prone and powerless ; all is over—drag him off. In gallop the bell-studded team of prancing mules ; ropes are hurriedly attached to the carcase—*arre !* a cloud of dust—up with the barrier—better luck next time, *caballeros !*

On the whole, those of our party who were new to the *corrida* were satisfied with the sport. They could not but confess, most of them, that it was cruel—that no amount of skill and daring could make it, according to British notions, manly ; but neither could they help owning to the excitement attending the moment when, the gates being thrown wide, the *toro* is expected to make his dash into the ring. Nor could they altogether withhold their meed of admiration for the calm indifference to danger, based upon the consciousness of skill, which was displayed by such performers as Pepe Garcia and Juan Diez. In short, it was worth seeing *once* ; and though it was unlikely they would lay themselves out to witness future exhibitions of the sort, still, they had paid their money—

there was nothing else to do—they would return, therefore, and see the *fonction* played out on the two following days. Fastman, indeed, swore that the whole thing was first-rate—nothing like it in England—not even a fight for the champion's belt. Wagtayle, true to his *rôle*, stated that he should compose an epic on the day's events, feeling, he said, quite "bull-verse-y (*bouleversé*, we presume) on the subject. This witticism being addressed to Gormansby was but grimly acknowledged, for the latter officer loved not that style of facetiousness which owes its point to a play upon words, nor indeed much appreciated any which contained not matter rendering it unsuitable for ears of sensitive delicacy. But poor Wagtayle belonged to the tribe of incorrigibles, and could devise mirth even out of that which is calculated to inspire the human mind with feelings of solemnity. On a court-martial, for instance, in the midst of the prisoner's defence, or while the dignified president was being sworn; at church, during the most impressive part of some "sensation" discourse, Wagtayle was to be seen sitting with half a pocket-handkerchief crammed into his mouth, his eyes suffused with moisture, and the veins of his crimson forehead swollen and knotted, while on either side, led by the contagion of his example, agonised pairs of eyes would fearfully wander in the direction of the commanding-officer, the owners being all more or less under the tortures of suppressed laughter.

To return—the next day and the next were in no way different from the first, except as regards the absence of the Cuchillero, who was replaced by a rather inferior hand.



Upon such a disposition as that of Frank Wilmot, the sports palled, and became even loathsome towards the close, and it was with joy that he hailed the clang of the barriers closing on the mangled carcase of the last wretched bull. *Viva, viva!* a *bull-calf* is let loose in the arena, and, leaping over the barriers in every direction, the brave *Españoles* rush to display their bottled-up valour. Bah! like other amateur exhibitions, it is more interesting to the performers than the spectators; *vaminos!* let the garlic-eaters play out their play. A very good *corrida*—quite up to the average—eighteen bulls, *señores*, as the cards set forth, and thirty-two horses, more or less promptly, gored to death, which was fully as much as the *señores* could reasonably expect. *Addios! beso los manos, señoritas—hasta rivederse, caballeros!*

A small dinner-party having been arranged on board the *Bittern* for that evening, Marston and Gormansby at once proceeded thither, leaving Wilmot and the others to follow at their leisure. As for Basil Thornfield, he had managed to slip away towards the close of the *corrida*, and was nowhere to be found. On arriving on board about an hour afterwards, Frank was surprised to find his friend, the leader of the gipsies, in conversation with Gormansby.

"Ah! the young *señor*," said the Zingari, with courteous elevation of his *sombrero*, "whom I have had the pleasure to see at the *posada de 'Las Quatras Naciones'*"——

"Hush!—all right—glad to see you," hastily interposed Frank, slightly embarrassed. "Look here," continued he, leading the gipsy a little apart from the rest, who stood in

a group round Gormansby and Marston, "I wanted to speak to you—to ask you a question or two about what took place that night."

"*A la disposicion de uested, señor,*" said the gipsy, smiling.

"Well—that man—the *torero*—what on earth made him so furious at me, who never set eyes on him before?"

"The *torero*—Pepe Garcia, the señor means? *Carai*; does the señor remember how he was occupied when Pepe entered the *posada*?"

"Occupied? I remember this much, that a woman was chattering a heap of nonsense about my fortune."

"It was so—yes—Carlota Zegri."

"And what is Carlota Zegri, if that be her name, to Pepe Garcia?"

"*Caramba!* that is easy told. Pepe Garcia (and that is not his name any longer than he likes) is by birth a *Zingari*, and Carlota Zegri is his wife."

"The devil! Why on earth, then, did not you, who seem kindly disposed towards us English, give me a hint of the danger?"

"Señor," said the gipsy, gravely, "I am kindly disposed to the *Ingleses*, and most of all to friends of good Don Morley. But I thought all was safe then, and *en verdad*, there was no harm in Carlota reading the señor's fortune on his palm. Besides, I knew that by right the Cuchillero could not be there, having to present himself in the Plaza next day. But some one of Zantero's people

—a meddling dog!—slipt out and told Pepe, and—*ahora!* *el señor* knows all about the matter."

The point was certainly cleared up, however easy Frank's conscience remained on the score of his intentions, but there was no necessity now for pursuing the subject, and he reverted to a topic which had also been much on his mind since the occurrence.

"It is probable that my life was saved through your exertions," said he, hastily transferring something from his waistcoat-pocket to the gipsy's ready palm. "I have no way but this to thank you—very inadequately, certainly."

"Señor, not so," replied Pequinez, referring to Frank's modest disclaimer, which he only half understood, but pocketing the *douceur* with much *nonchalance*; "*muchas gracias*—the señor is too good, too liberal; but," added he, sinking his voice to a whisper, "take a poor gipsy's advice—do not come on shore at night while you remain. Pepe will leave Malaga to-morrow, but he will not be far off; it is not safe to come; he has received a blow from the señor's hand, and more than one on his account, and he will be yearning for revenge, which with *him* means nothing less than blood. *Con Dios, señor, hasta rivederse!*"

"Stay—one moment!" said Frank, detaining the gipsy, as he seemed about to take leave. "No mischief happened to any of your people, I trust, after we got away."

"*Cuerpo!* no, señor—a scratch or so, here and there, and a tumble or two, but all was soon quiet; for the señor knows"—here the gipsy wound up with a very coarse

Spanish saying, bearing reference to the action of medicine on the human system, and setting forth that when the disturbing element is ejected, the ailment ceases to exist.

Grasping once more the young officer's hand with his own dark slender fingers, Ramon Pequinez now departed for the shore, carrying with him the cordial adieux of the party, and sundry more substantial acknowledgments of his services from Sinnewes and others, who now came forward.

"Hallo!" said Gormansby, looking round, as they were about to sit down to dinner, "where the deuce is Thornfield?"

Marston, towards whom he looked inquiringly, shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say? I noticed him," said he, "give us the slip in the Plaza towards the end of the performances; but when Basil has a project in his head he does not well brook interference, and is impatient sometimes of observation; but we may dine with easy minds," continued he, laughing; "our friend will neither enter upon any mischief for mischief's sake, nor easily run his head into any danger, out of which he cannot fight his way; and he is perfectly acquainted with the ways of the country. Is that actually turtle?"

"Gunter's Honduras," quoth Gormansby, in a sort of oily tone of voice, suggestive of moisture on the palate. "Shall I help you?" and the great business of dining went comfortably forward.

With jest and merriment, good wine and fragrant Havan-

nahs, the evening passed pleasantly on board till a late hour. Then, hailing a shore-boat, those of the party who were domiciled at the hotel, left for their own quarters, pleased with the events of the evening, satisfied with their noble selves, rousing, with vociferous mirth, to noisy rivalry the canine guardians of various anchored feluccas on the way, and mistifying with badinage culled from the *répertoire* of Father Thames (or what they took, in their limited experience, to be the genuine article) the wondering boatmen of Malaga harbour. About half-way to the shore, a two-oared boat glided rapidly by in the direction whence they had come.

"Thornfield!" said Sinnewes, looking after the dusky figure seated motionless in the stern.

Thornfield it was. That individual now clambered up the side of the yacht, dismissing with curt *nonchalance* the growling Charon.

"Why, Thornfield, my good fellow, we thought you had evaporated. Where on earth have you been, and how have you dined?" asked Gormansby, rousing himself and preparing to give orders for refreshing appliances.

Marston, bending forward, as he stood leaning against the cabin hatchway, peered curiously into Basil's countenance.

"Been? Oh! for a lark," said the latter, with a strange savage laugh, "and ended with chasing a wild goose, as the saying is. May I ask for soda-water, or lemonade, or something? Pah! I'm half choked with dust and heat, and—dinner, did you say? Yes—no—I ate something

somewhere, I think; nothing more now, at all events, thank you. There goes the cork of my soda-water—your healths, and I'm off to roost. *Buenas noches, caballeros!* as the Spaniards say, d——n them."

"The sooner I get him out of this the better, I suspect," half-soliloquised Marston, as he prepared to follow his comrade down the cabin hatchway. "There seems to be something wrong here, though I can't quite make it out."

It was nothing to Gormansby, at all events, nor was he going to trouble his head about the matter, so he merely ejaculated "'Hm," in a tone of vacant politeness, and continued to smoke, and to gaze at the countless myriads of twinkling stars.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE TORERO "AT HOME."

NEXT morning, being the last of their stay at Malaga, Marston was somewhat relieved to find that Basil Thornfield assented without demur to their remaining quietly on board till the hour of sailing. This, as arranged, was to be about three o'clock or so in the afternoon, which would allow plenty of time to collect their live freight, and would bring them, they calculated, off Gibraltar towards gunfire; and they would disembark at their leisure next day.

Wilmot had agreed to go on shore, and witness the start of the remainder who had engaged horses, and were to make the journey overland; stopping for the night at Marbella, which would be a convenient half-way halt, or proceeding right on as circumstances might dictate. The truth was, Frank in his heart rather yearned to join this party, instead of making the return trip in the *Bittern*. It is at his time of life that the saying holds good which ascribes a charm to variety, overbalancing other considerations of greater weight with the more advanced in years. As we progress, things gradually assume an equilibrium—they do not keep it—the other end of the log rises high in

air. What then? It is the inevitable see-saw of existence, and we are content. Be so, with us, good veterans—poking the coals from your easy-chairs in the snug corner away from the draft; and be charitable in thought to the shouting crowd of children, let loose from school next door, wild for the snow fight, or—your special horror, *O patres conscripti*!—the long, insidious, glittering, black slide upon the frosted pavement. Spare not, however, to balk their sport with dust and ashes—it was so with yourselves—will be with them both now and ever;—hopes will rise, bright and sanguine, in their adult breasts, when haply you sleep calmly with *your* fathers; but the cold, *blasé* hand of Time will ever be ready to sprinkle with ashes their bright anticipations.

Having lunched at their usual hour, Gormansby and his two friends were seated upon deck, watching for the return of the cutter's boat, which had gone to collect lingerers (Graves being also on shore) and transact business connected with the commissariat.

"Here she comes," said Gormansby, reaching out his hand for a telescope which lay near; "and our stray sheep all right. Now, then, we'll up anchor and be off, for there's no trusting to the wind hereabout, fresh as it blows at present, and the more law we allow ourselves the better—but, what the mischief—that's not Wilmot—looks like Sinnewes"——

"No more *posada* frolics, I trust," said Marston.

Gormansby, a little out of humour, shrugged his shoulders, and looked on discontentedly as the gig drew near.



"Hallo! something wrong there," quoth Thornfield; "that young man seems to have hurt his leg, I think."

And indeed the gallant Sinnewes, his dexter limb in a powerless state, was now being hoisted on board by a couple of the cutter's men. Graves followed, with his usual air of lazy *insouciance*.

"Nothing very horrible," Sinnewes hastened to explain—"nothing at all, in fact—a sprain—slipped and twisted my right ancle, trying, like a fool, to take an aloe hedge, just beyond the Alameda there. So I throw myself on your hospitality, Gormansby, though it's a cool enough thing to do; for I'm done for riding, and Wilmot kindly offered to take my horse, and give me up his berth—always supposing you don't object."

"Object, my good fellow? You are as welcome as daylight," quoth Gormansby, who recovered his serenity as soon as it became apparent he was not to be put to inconvenience; "but it was absurd in Wilmot to make any such arrangement, for there was a berth perfectly at your service, and no necessity for meddling with his."

"But he seemed to like the notion," said the invalid; "there's a regular party of them, pretty fairly mounted, and we exchanged pea-jackets, and that sort of thing—by the by, I left him my revolver into the bargain, for there's no saying what company he may fall in with on the road."

Basil Thornfield pricked up his ears at this, and Marston also drew near with some gravity on his visage.

"Eh! what?" asked the former.

"*Ladrones*," replied Sinnewes; "regular *boca-a-tierra*

chaps; indeed, they say some of our friends the *toreros* are doing a bit of business in that line only a very few miles out, and the blessed *gendarmes* are afraid to go out after them."

"*Toreros*!—have you any reliable information?" ejaculated Thornfield, who seemed intensely interested at this point.

"Well, as far as any information can be reliable in this place—I spoke to a sergeant of carbineers, and he swore to the Cuchillero as having set his mark on a party of travellers only the night before last—somewhat between this and Marbella. It seems he's a well-known hand; and my friend takes his oath he could not be mistaken, both from the description and from his style of doing business—no gentle one, apparently."

Basil Thornfield here seized Marston by the arm, and the two conversed together for a moment apart.

Sinnewes went on, "I am ashamed, you know, Gormansby, upon my soul, I am, both for intruding myself upon you in this way, and for appearing to back out of what is something like danger; but, look here"—and the poor fellow, with a scarlet flush on his forehead, stripped the wrappings partly from the injured limb, and shewed the ankle swollen as big as three ordinary ones. "You see, I am really *hors de combat*; and the danger, after all, is less than it sounds like, for they are all well-armed, and have secured a guide, who is accustomed to the sort of thing, and seems honest, for a Spaniard."

"My dear fellow, they must take their chance; but I'm

sorry to see you in pain, and, I fear, nothing can be done for you till we get you under care of old Bowlas at home."

"Oh, never mind me!—thank you all the same. The gipsy fellow, Pequinez, rubbed it—fomented it—whatever you call it—and the pain is nothing, if I'm not in the way."

"Then we'll up stick, and be off—eh? what's the matter now?" asked Gormansby, a little querulously, as Marston and Thornfield approached and interposed, requesting a moment's hearing.

"Gormansby," quoth the former gentleman, "do you know, I'm not quite easy about those youngsters—that lad Wilmot, in particular.

"My dear sir, too late to send after him now."

"True, but listen to what Basil and I propose doing—I understand the party stop for the night at Marbella—if we do not overtake them, we shall probably find them there—we shall get our traps together, such of them as we want for the journey, in five minutes—then a cast ashore, and your forgiveness will be all that we shall crave at your hands."

"Upon my soul, Marston, this is being Quixotic."

"Not so, my dear fellow; I—I never mentioned the circumstance, I believe, but—this young man's relations are well-known to me, and I have had kindness from them in days past; I shall feel pleasure in watching over him on this occasion, and Basil will not stay behind where I lead in a matter of this sort. See, he has got the things together already, and now—a boat, a boat, and let us exchange 'God speed!'"

The arrangement so suddenly mooted was actually fixed before Gormansby had time to recover from his surprise. A dusty ride of seventy miles, stale eggs and goatmilk cheese *versus* a comfortable berth and Gunter's Honduras——ah, well—no use puzzling over it. The moon was at the full, which might in part account for it.

"*Au revoir!*" said the gallant officer, with no very gracious expression of countenance, as the two lunatics descended the side of the cutter, carrying with them, among other things, a brace of short straight swords, to the grip of which their fingers were well accustomed. "Sharp back with the gig, you men—wind shifting—I'm hanged if it ain't"—and off they went.

The boat returning immediately, according to orders, the *Bittern*, without further delay, spread her white pinions, and gracefully took flight for Gibraltar. And so we leave her to her uneventful voyage home, returning to watch the doings of our travellers by land.

It had indeed been without reluctance, that Frank Wilmot, under the circumstances, resigned his berth to his friend Sinnewes. The former, was, notwithstanding, perfectly aware that room would have been readily made for his disabled comrade without the sacrifice of his own place on board; but the preparations of the overland party looked so tempting, and their anticipations of its pleasures were so joyous, (containing just that spice of peril which made the flavour exquisite,) that he chose to assume a degree of modesty somewhat beyond the occasion; the result being the message brought on board, as above, by

the invalid. All was now bustle and hilarity in the *patio* of the hotel. Mantas and saddle-bags were strapped on; revolvers loaded and deposited in holsters, or slung in waist-belts; horses (not a very promising-looking lot certainly, being, probably, those destined for next year's *corrida de toros*) elaborately girthed and bridled. After all, they were warranted to have plenty of "go" in them, when warm. Sinnewes, at parting, had, as a last injunction, recommended Frank to keep his "weather eye" on Fastman's manœuvres.

"He'll try to do you, if he can," said he, "about the horses. Most of us are up to his tricks; but you, as being somewhat green, (which word I use only in its Pickwickian sense,) may chance to come in for a touch of his diplomacy. Now, look here—I went to the stables and picked out my own horse—that chestnut—the best and safest of the lot. Unless I'm confoundedly mistaken, Augustus will try to exchange with you—that big-kneed gray—a regular dog-horse. And now, forewarned is forearmed, you know; and if you let him come the old soldier over you, you've got yourself to blame. Good-bye, old fellow; shan't forget your good nature about the berth."

Accordingly, no sooner had the disabled hero started than Lieutenant Fastman of the County Bingo commenced operations, and boldly, as being confident with regard to his man.

"Hallo! you, *mozo*, shift my saddle, will you, to that horse with the red *manta*, on the outside of the lot; whose is it? Yours, Wilmot? All right, you're twice my

weight, and my gray is the horse cut out for you ; look at him—there's *bone* ! The weedy chestnut will carry my small carcase well enough."

Bone there certainly was, and (if we except a somewhat damaged-looking hide) very little else. Besides, Master Augustus was rather at fault in his premises, for though shorter, he was certainly the heavier man.

"Thank you, Fastman ; Sinnewes handed over that horse to me. I prefer the previous arrangement to this of yours, very much ; we will stick to it, please." Wilmot's tone, though quiet, was one which precluded argument on the subject, and the schemer felt that he was foiled.

"As you like—it was for your own good," growled he, turning away ; "what amuses you fellows, I wonder ? Ah, by the by, wait five minutes for me, will you ? I've forgotten a stunning batch of Malaga figures I bought yesterday, just round the corner—must run for them ; hold on for a spell, there's no such thundering hurry."

"Always the way with you, confound you !" was the general remark. Five minutes, ten, twenty, elapsed, and no Lieutenant Fastman.

"Oh, this is humbug, you know ; it will be dark before we get half-way to Marbella, and the guide is looking as fidgety as a brood hen in a coop. Get to horse, lads—if he makes his appearance by the time we are ready to start, good and well ; if not, it serves him right to have to gallop after us—he can't miss the road."

Another speaker went the length of hinting that if he did, and never turned up again, there was greater loss at a

certain disputed field of battle in Scotland ; and the issue was, that, with the single exception of Frank Wilmot, the whole party, growling, laughing, chaffing the not-ill-requited *mozo*, got fairly on horseback for departure.

"What are you about, Frank Wilmot? Come along man—come."

"No, by Jove ; I can't think of quite leaving him in the lurch, after all. I'll just give him five minutes more ; I can easily catch you up, I know, on that chestnut, and Fastman, if I'm not mistaken, will take it out of the old gray's ribs without remorse, when he sees a chance of being benighted. All right, old fellows ; Fastman has travelled this road before, and we'll be up with you by the time you've cleared the suburbs,—if you must."

"Better leave him to his own devices—it's a confounded bad precedent giving in to his nonsense."

"No ; I'll give him five minutes."

"As you like ; all ready, boys? Then, give them their heads, Bill, that is, go on, old gentleman," (this to the guide.) "*Pronto?* yes, d——n you, go ahead! Bye, bye, Frank—you're a donkey, beyond retrieval if you give him more than two minutes ;" and with noise and clatter enough for a troop of dragoons, the cavalcade of bold Britons filed out of the courtyard, and along the side road of the Alameda.

Two, five, ten minutes went by, and Fastman came not. At last, as Frank, turning in despair from the door of the hotel, thought seriously of girthing up, and leaving the delinquent to his fate, that hero came round the corner

at ten miles an hour, with his face as red as a lobster, and his hands empty.

"Hallo! All gone but you? Well, hang me if they're not a set of selfish, disobliging—couldn't you keep them for a few minutes, man alive?" Thus much in recognition of Frank's good nature in waiting for him, from Mr Augustus Fastman.

Frank could not help laughing. "Well," replied he, "get to horse now, at all events. We'll have to make a spirt for it to catch them up."

"Must have a glass of bitter beer first; I'm as thirsty as a pelican."

"Be quick about it, then, can't you," said Frank, losing patience. "Where are those figures you talked about, and where have you been?"

"Oh, the dealer was a regular chouse. Saw I was hard up for time, and thought he could ask what he liked, for we didn't settle about the price yesterday. Bitter ale, *mozo*," vociferated Augustus, busy about the saddle of his lean quadruped, and then preparing to mount. "Hold him, can't you, Wilmot. Stand still, you brute. Your health. Now then, I thought you were in a hurry to start. Why ain't you mounted? *Vamos!*" and the two in their turn sallied forth from the court-yard.

"Discount!" Fastman shouted back to the waiter, who screeched after them some appeal, bearing reference to the bottle of beer just discussed. "Oil him up, Frank—give it him—trot," and before Wilmot could make out what



this last little episode meant, the words and gestures of the wretched *mozo* were alike lost in the distance.

"Why, bless my soul, Fastman, haven't you paid the man?" ejaculated the bewildered Frank.

"Paid him? Paid him a hanged sight too much, first and last," responded the former, coolly. "Come along, man. Blow me if I don't think I could beat you on old bag-o'-bones after all," said Augustus, oblivious of his late eulogiums on that steed.

"All very fine; but that won't do," replied Wilmot, somewhat sternly, and deliberately turning his horse's head round. "That being the sort of thing which brings us English into disrepute, it is my business, if it's not yours, Master Fastman," and, in spite of his companion's remonstrances, he rode back till near enough to throw the man a dollar, after which he again spurred after the delinquent, who made no further remark on the subject.

The increased pace at which they now rode, indeed, prevented further colloquy. Fastman led, and Frank followed, though conscious that he could easily change places whenever he should feel so disposed. At last, after about an hour's brisk riding, without seeing anything of their late companions, the former suddenly pulled up.

"Hallo! there are two roads here," said he.

Wilmot silently awaited the result of his cogitation.

"I'll be hanged if I quite recollect," muttered Fastman, scratching his chin with an air of perplexity. "Are there no fresh hoof-marks of the other chaps?"

The ground was baked as hard and dry as a brick:

"Humph! the road to the right, I—think. Yes; I'm almost sure; I recollect that cross; a sign that somebody got his jugular lanced there, Frank," quoth Fastman, far from liking the idea himself, but unable to resist the temptation of imparting a pleasant sensation to his comrade. "*Vamos!* I'm sure we're right now, and, by Jove! we'd better push on with a will, for those fellows must have gone ahead like blazes,—on purpose, of course, hang them. Wait till they come to us for our share of the guide's expenses, eh, Frank? That's one comfort;" and they pursued the route selected at a still further accelerated pace.

In this manner they continued to urge along their steeds as fast as the now increasing difficulties of the road permitted. At last these assumed such a shape that Frank thought it advisable to question his companion as to whether he were really certain they were pursuing the beaten road to Marbella, which, they had been given to understand, was, for a Spanish highway, tolerably good. As the only response vouchsafed by the morose Augustus was an injunction to "hold his row," coupled with an augmented play of the long rope's-end of that worthy's headstall about the lank ribs of the ancient gray, Frank held his peace, and made up his mind patiently to await the result, both of them now straining their eyes forward to catch a glimpse of the rest of the party, upon whom they must now be closing, unless they were really, of *malice prepense*, leaving them behind. No signs of them, al-

though a considerable tract of road, or what served as a road, lay open to their view; and now the path gave most suspicious indications of a tendency to veer away inland among the bleak brown hills, which rose in rugged layers at a little distance to their right.

Fastman, however, was now evidently looking about him in a very puzzled sort of manner.

"I say, Frank, I wish we may be on the scent after all," said he, turning round with a grin on his countenance, which was rather belied by the uneasy light in his eye. "What money have you about you?" inquired he, in the words, but certainly without the confident swagger, of the redoubted Bobadil.

"A couple of doubloons, and some loose dollars. But what is it to the purpose now?"

"Simply that *I* have nothing but a few *pesetas*; and the gentlemen of the road, when they catch a fellow with empty pockets, or thinly-lined ones, are in the habit of taking it out of his hide," responded the gallant Fastman.

"Have you no revolver? Yes—there it is, all right in your holster. What are you afraid of?" demanded Wilmot.

"I'm afraid I'm in company with a donkey," testily replied the other. "What do you think the *ladrones* care for your revolver? They hail you from behind an aloe bush with '*boca a tierra*,' and if you're not flat on your breadbasket in three seconds, smack goes a slug through your skull from an *escopeta*. Better give me the money, and I'll shew you how to manage."

A most indignant refusal to listen to anything of the sort terminated the discussion, and they proceeded a mile or so further, at a rather diminished rate, and in nearly total silence, for fear was more than beginning to usurp mischief in Master Fastman's brain; and Wilmot himself was far from comfortable. The latter looked at his revolver, which was in a holster at his saddle-bow, and felt in his waistcoat-pocket to assure himself that the percussion caps were handy.

"A cottage, by Jove!" at last called out Fastman. "We'll find out now whether we're right or wrong about the road, at all events," and he again whisked the rope's end about the ears of his steed. At this moment there came a ringing sound as of some metal substance against the stones, followed by a hobbling gait on the part of the old gray, and an exclamation of despair from his rider.

"Lost a shoe!—here's a pretty go!"

A bore indeed—what was to be done? Setting apart the question of humanity, it was evident that the venerable animal would be unable to progress much further unshod, and, to Frank Wilmot's infinite mental disquietude, the shadows were beginning palpably to lengthen.

"There was a goatherd, or something like that," said he, "sitting at the cross roads—why the deuce did not we ask him the way?"

Fastman, now thoroughly crestfallen, owned that he had been too confident at the time, to think it worth while trying to hammer his meaning into the peasant's brain.

"Besides," said he, "they don't understand regular

Spanish, these chaps. They all speak a beastly *patois*. But we must get on to the hovel yonder, at all events, and see what is to be done; it may be a blacksmith's, there's no saying," quoth Augustus, brightening up a little.

It was not. When they at last arrived at the door of the hut—a sort of roadside *venta*, boasting the possession, for sale, of *aguardiente*—and had succeeded in rousing the intelligence of the old Spaniard, who came out at their summons, in spite of his *patois*, and Fastman's pure Castilian, it became plain that no aid could be hoped for there in the matter of horse-shoes.

"What shall we do?" ejaculated the latter, despairingly; "we shall be devoured if we stay here all night—eh, what? *que dices, hombré?* Oh, then, by Jove, that's our only chance," continued he, after lending an attentive ear to some representation on the part of the old man. "Frank, he says there's a blacksmith about half-a-mile off, up that track there towards the hills—*only* half-a-mile, —what do you say? we can't stay here; impossible"——

"Let's send for the man at once—we shall have moonlight afterwards to pursue our route."

"By the holy, I was forgetting about the road—a—*mira*, old gentleman," and Augustus, with much elaboration, succeeded in imparting to the *venta*-keeper an inquiry as to whether they were then on the straight road to Marbella.

A convulsion of head-shaking and wagging of the forefinger greeted the question. "No, señor, no"—they should have kept the road to the left, five miles back.

Here was a pretty business. Not so bad as it might be, though; a little further on, a cross-road would bring them into the highway by the coast, once more.

"Then send at once"——

"Send—who are we to send?"

The venta-keeper emphatically declined, at the same time assuring them that it was but "a step and a half."

"I'll tell you what, it's your business as well as mine, Frank," quoth Fastman the modest; "I'll toss you who takes the chestnut and goes for the blacksmith. He'll come if he's well paid, and you can put the dollar in his hand, to shew it's all fair and above board."

"Well," said his good-natured companion, "I don't mind, only"——

"*Bueno!*" interrupted Augustus, "d'ye see this *peseta*? I spin—and call—heads! Heads it is," quoth the astute one, catching the coin in his palm, and inspecting it privately before extending it to Frank. O Fastman, Fastman, that honest youth is no match for you, and well you know it.

"Up that path to the right?" asked the latter, who at the commencement of this operation had felt somehow pretty sure that if the thing were to be done at all, he should have to do it: "well, it's no great trouble, if it's so near—no time to lose—here goes—if I should not succeed in getting the man, we must stop here, that's all—and this is the last time you and I travel *tête-à-tête*, Master Fastman," added he mentally, as he turned his horse's head in the direction indicated.

"I say," called out Fastman after him, with a newly-lighted cigar in his mouth, and a glass of *aguardiente* in his hand, "you might as well leave me that couple of doubloons, in case"——

A short laugh from Wilmot cut short this suggestion, as he urged his steed to what pace he could safely get out of him, over the rugged pathway. A turn of the acclivity soon hid the two gentlemen from each other's view.

The state of things was really anything but pleasant. It was positively fast approaching twilight, and though the moon now rose, bright and clear in the purple firmament, deep gray shadows began to veil the recesses of the hills, and to close gradually around, making objects dim and uncertain at no great distance from the eye. There was not, apparently, a living being within hail, and there was total silence, with the exception of an occasional scream from some bird of prey, soaring and wheeling, invisible, far above the rider's head.

"Why did not I take the advice of these fellows?" thought Frank Wilmot, as, peering about in all directions, he could perceive nothing bearing the faintest resemblance to a human habitation. "Why must I mix myself up with this fellow's scrapes, well knowing, as I did, that he not only contrives to lug his comrades into them, but to shift his own share of the consequences to their shoulders, if he can! Why"—he was proceeding in this frame of self-interrogation, when a sudden twinkle of light, like a ruddy coruscation, seemed to spring into existence on the dark hillside before him.

“Hurra! all right at last. The abode of Vulcan beyond a doubt, and the owner at work, too, if that red glare tells a true tale. For the rest of the matter, if the breast of the swart deity be susceptible of such earthly emotions as pity, or avarice in a small way, he shall be lured from his retreat, and a cast of his office obtained.” Frank’s knowledge of the language, as we are aware, was of the most slender, but pantomime would readily enough supply the tongue’s deficiencies in this instance. Pondering after this fashion, he arrived at a spot from which the path he had been hitherto pursuing appeared to diverge in a direction contrary to the position of the little cabin, whence the light still streamed in a broad column for some distance through the darkness. What seemed to be a mere goat-track apparently led off from the broader pathway down to the hut, and Wilmot, without any hesitation, feeling certain in his own mind that he was now on the right scent, alighted from his horse, and led him carefully down the rugged hillside. As he approached within about fifty yards of the hut, the light from the window was obscured, as though shutters were closed over the aperture, a feeble ray only now struggling, as it were, through a chink here and there in the rude frame. As far as the guidance of Wilmot’s footsteps was concerned, however, this was of no consequence, or, indeed, rather an advantage, for the moonlight now shone, clear and undisturbed, on the track which led right up to the entrance of the dwelling.

Frank listened here for a moment. A grumbling voice was distinctly heard within, and a chinking sound, though



scarcely that of iron upon iron, unless the blacksmith were an artist, and engaged upon work of a finer sort than the look of his residence would have led one to expect. No matter; this must be the object of Frank's search, or, at the worst, he could ascertain where the latter was to be found. With this reflection, still keeping the bridle of his horse slung over his left arm, he bestowed with the handle of his riding-whip a smart blow on the crazy framework of rough deals, which did duty for a door. An instantaneous stoppage of both sounds above referred to, and a noise as of some one springing in a startled manner to his feet, succeeded. Frank, after a pause, during which he heard something very suspiciously like an execration, repeated his assault on the portal.

"*Quien es?*" now came in deep tones from the interior of the cabin.

"*Amigo!*" answered the officer. "*Hay caballo—quiero uested, señor blacksmith;*" with which triumphant specimen of oratory he rested satisfied, pending the removal of bolt and bar, which was now going on.

"*Inglese,*" one individual could be heard to growl to another, with various expletives unnecessary here to repeat, but which sounded anything but auspicious for the object of Frank's mission.

Almost as the word was spoken, the bar inside was cast to the ground, the door swung open with a creak which threatened destruction to its leathern hinges, and a burly figure appeared on the threshold, holding up an oil lamp to inspect the traveller's features, so near that the latter

involuntarily stepped back a pace. To his utter astonishment, in one instant he was seized as with a grasp of iron, and dragged into the hut, whence, in the midst of his confusion and bewilderment, he heard the clash of his horse's hoofs in full retreat!

"*Ho! ho! Cuerpo de San Bartolomeo!*" shouted the man, who now placed himself with his back to the reclosed door, and, with his arms akimbo, stared exultingly at the blank visage of the young man—for one glance was sufficient to shew him, into what trap he had fallen. "*Ho! ho! caballero, venga; entra la casa del torero!*"

Yes; the rude door was again bolted and barred; Frank's revolver was in the holster at his saddle-bow—and he was the guest of El Cuchillero!

The man's ferocious features were flushed with savage glee; he hugged himself as it were, while he placed a sort of rough table against the door, and, seating himself thereon, folded his huge arms exultingly over his breast. The chief part of what he said was, of course, unintelligible to poor Frank, but there was no mistaking its general purport, full as it was of horrible significance. We shall partly translate the *torero's* expressions, avoiding such accompaniments as are not essential to their meaning, and are unfit for ears polite.

"*Cuerpo!*" said he, leering in the direction of his companion, a man dressed in the ordinary costume of a peasant, so far as could be ascertained by the light of the small lamp above mentioned, and a fire of wood, which he was busy piling with twigs; "*cuerpo de Dios!* the young *señor* has

come all the way off his road to visit the poor *torero*, admiring him so much in the *corrida*, no doubt,—or, stay—it was the *torero's* wife, the *Capitan Inglese* came to see; ha! I compliment myself too much in this—*si, si*—but the *señor* must be content—Carlota is not here—no matter—Pepe is glad to see the *señor* in his rough way, and will provide what entertainment he can, in the *señora's* absence.”

The other man, who had been stooping over the fire with his back towards the speaker, turned round with a grin upon his sullen countenance, which was now lighted up by the blaze; Frank glanced towards him hopelessly—if his heart could have sunk lower, it would probably have done so then, for his eye met the cold leer of the *picador*, Juan Diez, who, he could not but be aware, was the most unlikely person in the world to extend to him the hand of succour or protection, even were it in his power.

Frank Wilmot was as gallant a young fellow as need be; he would probably have gone up to storm a battery, or stood to meet a cavalry charge, with perhaps the slightly increased heart-action which is inevitable in a first field; yet without a thought in that heart which need bring a flush to his cheek in after hours. But he was very young, was thoroughly unprepared for such a crisis as this, and had to collect his faculties before he could even realise the full amount of peril which now seemed to beset him. Still, he was an English gentleman, his hands as yet were unfettered, his limbs free for action, and, his pulses having beat their wildest during the last few moments, a reaction

began to take place. He glanced hurriedly round the hut, before making up his mind what course to adopt. It was a mere shell of a place, apparently little more than a kind of shed, composed of rough layers of stone and turf, such as would be used by goatherds or others of similar occupation in the pursuit of their daily avocations. There was no furniture but a rough plank table, and a couple of crazy seats of the same material, the former being placed athwart the doorway, and embellished by the huge form of the chief actor in the drama. A couple of swords, like those used in the bull-ring, stood in the further corner of the hut, and each of the Spaniards wore a *navaja*, stuck in the folds of his coarse red sash. Frail as the tenement might be, however, escape seemed out of the question. Frank made one attempt at conciliation.

"I have but little money about me," said he, addressing himself to the bigger ruffian, and producing the two doubloons elsewhere mentioned; "but if you will take my word for it, I promise to transmit from Gibraltar as soon as I get there, any amount you may think proper to name that is within my power."

The Cuchillero, it is needless to say, understood very little of this appeal—nor did it much signify, he having settled his line of action according to his own plan. He took the money, which the young man extended towards him, chinked it carelessly, and placed it on the table beside him, with a grin.

"*Yo hablo Ingles* very well," said he, jeeringly; "but I

am somewhat deaf—deaf from a blow, *señor*, that I received some three nights since, in the *posada* of the four nations;—my ear tingles ever since so that I can hear nothing but the one word that is ever thundering in it—revenge!”

Poor Wilmot could not mistake the tone in which this was spoken. With one moment's feeling of unutterable grief, as he thought of those to whom his wretched fate would be a life-long source of mourning, he drew himself up, folded his arms over his breast, and returned the bull-fighter's mocking gaze with one as stern as his own. The Cuchillero seemed actually half impressed with this—he resumed in an altered tone.

“It is simply the *duello* I have the honour to propose,” said he, gravely; “the *duello* by the *navaja*, which we poor Spaniards best understand—*mira*, young *señor Ingleses*, behold a weapon—take it, and do your worst on the Cuchillero!”

He pointed as he spoke to a heap of rugs in a corner near at hand, from beneath one of which protruded the handle of a knife, such as he himself wore in his girdle. Frank, after a moment's hesitation, seized it. The *picador* burst into a roar of laughter; it was indeed a knife handle, and nothing else, the blade being snapped off close to the haft.

“Juan,” said the *matador*, still in a tone of affected gravity, but as if scarcely able to stifle the murderous glee which shone in his eyes, “if I fall, spend these in masses

for my soul"—and he tossed to his companion poor Frank's two doubloons.

"It is over, then," murmured the poor lad, covering his eyes with his hand; "so young—so young—father—mother—God comfort you, and pardon me my sins."

El Cuchillero got off the table where he was sitting, drew the *navaja* from his girdle, opened it, and ran his finger along the edge.

"*Bueno!*" said he; "*muy bueno*"——

At this moment the *picador* suddenly started to his feet, and raised one hand with a listening gesture.

"H'st," said he, dropping on his knees, and bending one ear down to the earthen floor.

The meaning of the action was plain; one lightning flash of hope darted through Wilmot's bosom. Dashing at the table which stood across the doorway, he grasped and hurled it into the centre of the hut. By the dear light of heaven, there *is* a sound of horses' hoofs coming at furious speed up the pathway! "Help!" shouted he, in one convulsive, long-drawn scream.

With a furious execration, the *matador* seized him by the throat. There was a brief struggle—exerting all his strength, the ruffian cast the young officer from him with terrible force. Frank's head struck against the corner of the table as he fell—he had but time to see the bull-fighters each grasp a weapon—to see the door of the hut dashed in fragments into the middle of the apartment, and the stalwart form of Basil Thornfield loom dark against the moon-

light without, while the fire-gleams flashed back from his sword-blade as it flew from the scabbard—there floated through Frank's brain, as it were, a cry of fierce recognition—when a mist came over his eyesight, and, murmuring "Saved, saved!" he sunk back upon the floor in a death-like swoon.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BACK TO "THE ROCK."

THE blow which the young officer received on the temple while falling had been a severe one; but a flow of blood which followed probably averted in a great measure the evil consequences which might have ensued. Upon first beginning to recover consciousness, he became aware of a sensation as of something cool and moist about the region of his temples. Rousing himself partially, with a heavy sigh, he mechanically raised his hand to the spot, and encountered a linen cloth, or handkerchief, apparently saturated with water, and laid on his brow. An earthen vessel containing the pure element was by his side, stretched as he was upon the floor, his head being supported by his own overcoat, which had been rolled up and placed beneath by way of pillow. Feeling about his forehead, he discovered that, in one place, it was painful to the touch; but getting now nearly restored to the full use of his faculties, he raised himself upon his elbow and surveyed the scene before him.

Seated on one of the rude benches was Colonel Marston, his right arm bared to the shoulder, and stretched out



upon the table, in the light of the oil lamp, which had been picked up and retrimmed; and, bending over the limb, in the act of binding it up with strips of linen bandage, was his faithful ally, Thornfield.

They both looked up as Frank raised himself upon his elbow. Basil, who had a penknife between his teeth, nodded his congratulations, while Marston laughed and spoke.

"All's well that ends well," said he, gaily; "an incident for your next letter home, captain—but how are you now?"

"All right, I believe—it is nothing—but *you*" ——

"So much the better, for we shall have to ride for it, presently."

"But I fear you have suffered more than I have; how can I thank you? You have saved my life" ——

Frank looked towards Thornfield as he spoke; the man-at-arms, still intent on his piece of surgery, nodded once more, and mumbled, "You're very welcome, my good lad; but never mind that now."

Wilmot had now regained his feet, and felt tolerably firm upon them, all things considered. With the exception of the pain about *his* temples, he really was little the worse for the rough treatment he had undergone.

"But are you really hurt, Colonel Marston?" inquired he, anxiously, "and where" ——he stopped abruptly, for at this moment his eye, wandering round the hut, encountered that of Juan Diez, who lay, bound hand and foot, in the corner opposite. The *picador*, then, was alive and unhurt, as far as could be judged by that unaltered, cruel, livid

glare; but that heap of garments on the other side, that something undefined but horribly suggestive of the lately dismantled tenement of a human soul, Frank shuddered, and the accents froze on his tongue, as he gazed on that.

Thornfield's bit of surgery, whatever it was, being now completed, Marston stood up, and drawing over him his coat, without placing his right arm in the sleeve, approached the young man, whose action again betrayed a slight faintness.

"Hand me your flask, Basil—take a few drops of this restorative, Captain Wilmot—you will want strength for the journey we have before us—the sooner we are off the better; we must not let the grass grow at our nags' heels, when we're on the road. Let's look at you—does your head pain you?"

"Nothing to speak of—you have borne the brunt of it, I fear, and I never can sufficiently thank"—

"My arm, you mean? A mere scratch—a flesh wound and a clean one—these *torero* swords cut like razors; but it was as well to strap it up, for blood-letting, though a good thing in its way, is not necessary for me at present, that's all."

While saying this, Marston was inspecting the damage on Frank's frontispiece.

"Nothing, I believe, Basil," said he, turning to his companion, who was polishing his sword with a bit of woollen rag. "All's well—we may get to horse—keep the handkerchief round it, though, my good fellow. Can you bear your cap on the top of it? so"—and, in spite of Frank's remonstrances, he busied himself with his one

hand in putting matters to rights. "I'm accustomed to this sort of thing," said he.

"So you may be, but I'll be hanged if you shall trouble yourself about my scratched forehead any more, Colonel Marston; I'm quite ashamed to act patient when I'm more able to play the doctor, if I only knew how," stammered Wilmot, who would have given worlds to have hit upon some method of disburdening his heart of the gratitude which lay there.

"No occasion for any doctors here, my dear fellow—thank God for it. Some have been spared the necessity for them, and—and one is past it; his blood be upon his guilty head! Now Basil, the horses, the horses!"

Thornfield, who was evidently in a taciturn mood, left the hut without speaking. Frank looked inquiringly towards Marston.

"He is dead, then?" asked he, shudderingly, with a motion of his hand towards the heap in the corner.

"He is dead—having met the fate to which his hand has consigned many of his fellow-men."

"You knew him, then—knew something of his former life?"

"Ay, truly. Basil gave you a sketch of his own history, the other day, he tells me—you remember the assassins hired by Linares?"

"Yes, yes!—is it possible?"——

"One expiated his crimes by the *garrote*, the other escaped to perpetrate many more ere his bloody career came to an end. Yonder he lies. Strange, is it not?"

As Frank was about to reply, Thornfield's voice, accompanied by the sound of horses' hoofs, was heard at the door of the cabin.

"I have got two of them all right; the third is dodging about at their tails—he wont go off—you've nothing to do but to catch him by the bridle, which is dragging under his feet."

To secure the stray horse was the business of a moment. It was Frank's chestnut, and as the young man mounted, he felt thoroughly restored to his natural self, and ready for anything in the shape of exercise.

As the two others left the hut, the *picador* suddenly poured forth a few vehement words. It was the first time Frank had heard this man's voice, which was harsh and discordant, as were his features. Marston stopped to listen, and then, with an ejaculation of scorn and a derisive laugh, got to horse, and followed the two others, Basil Thornfield being leader, along the pathway.

"He is uneasy at the notion of a *tête-à-tête* with his late comrade and superior," said Marston, shortly, in answer to a question from Frank.

Pursuing their route at as rapid a pace as was practicable, they now arrived at the *venta* by the roadside. It was barely nine o'clock, and the old man was still stirring. He, being questioned, speedily enlightened them as to the proceedings of the brave Augustus Fastman. That officer, getting both impatient and nervous after Marston and Thornfield had passed, had hailed with joy the arrival of a string of muleteers conveying merchandise to Ronda,

which was all in his way so far, and having bribed them by dint of munificent promises to hand him over a spare horse, and permit him to join their cavalcade, had fairly started off with them, leaving behind the old gray to await the return of the guide from Gibraltar. He also left a message for Frank to the effect that he was to follow as fast as he could, and to reimburse the venta-keeper for sundry instalments of creature-comforts supplied both to himself and, at his instance, to the muleteers.

Now there was certainly thus much to be said in extenuation of Mr Fastman's conduct—that Marston and Thornfield were, to his knowledge, on Frank's track; still the latter could not help reflecting that Augustus was probably the only man of his acquaintance who would not have braved some peril and inconvenience for the sake of *seeing* a comrade safe, especially when that comrade was actually incurring both on his (Lieutenant Fastman's) own proper concerns. But who expected anything else from him? Not Basil Thornfield, who, having been rather silent up to this time, now made the echoes ring with hearty laughter.

"He'll die in his bed that young man," quoth he, as he produced and lighted his meerschaum; a sign that the cloud, whatever it may have been, was passing from his spirit.

*En parenthèse*, however, it is astonishing how much licence in selfishness, as in other failings, the world will grant to one who is duly consistent therein.

"Did you hear of the mean thing Greatheart did the

other day?" asks the indignant world. "Who would have thought it of Greatheart?"

"What think you of Skinflint's dodge in that matter of Lackland's?" demands society, chuckling. "*So like Skinflint*—you should hear him tell it himself—the best thing we ever heard;" and so it is—to all but Lackland.

Starting afresh on their journey along the beaten road, Frank had now leisure to ask, and his fellow-travellers to give, an explanation of the providential circumstance which saved the former from death.

They had left Malaga about half-an-hour after he and Fastman started. Arrived at the cross-roads, they there learned from a goatherd the error made by the two wayfarers in their route, and accelerating their pace, had soon come up to the little *venta*, where they encountered Lieutenant Fastman. Possessed of much greater knowledge of the language, both pure and *patois*, than that officer, they had been able promptly to cross-examine the old man, and learned, not only that it was quite possible Frank might miss his way among the mountains, but also that, if he did, he might stumble upon a hut occupied since the previous morning by a brace of *toreros* from the *Malaga corrida*. "*Muy mala gente!*" said the *venta*-keeper, shaking his thin gray locks.

Incited to exertion, the one by serious doubts as to the young officer's safety—the other, by the fierce expectation, in addition, of finding himself confronted at last by one to whom he had sworn that his debt should be paid, principal and interest, should ever an opportunity offer, the two

horsemen made what haste they could on Wilmot's track. Guided by and by by the feeble ray which shone from the hut window, and alarmed by meeting Frank's horse returning riderless up the hillside, they, disregarding all difficulties of the pathway, spurred furiously towards the cabin door. Our readers are acquainted in a general way with the rest. The *matador*, Pepe Garcia, fell, after a very brief struggle, before the furious onslaught of Thornfield, while the *picador*, who was encountered by Marston, was almost simultaneously thrown down and disarmed, first, however, inflicting a slight wound on that gentleman's sword arm.

Such was the episode of the hut among the mountains. Never, we will venture to say, will Frank Wilmot, during the course of his future existence, stand in more deadly peril than that which menaced him there.

A thought here struck Basil Thornfield. He turned round in his saddle, pipe in hand.

"By the way, lad, did they rob you?" inquired he.

"Yes, by Jove, they did," replied Frank. "I had perfectly forgot that part of it. I handed out a couple of doubloons."

"Then, I'll be hanged," said Basil, smiting his thigh with one hand, "if the *picador* does not remain master of the situation;" and again the echoes rang with the hearty laughter of the man-at-arms. The latter, now in excellent spirits, pursued the subject jestingly.

"Why, you might have paid yourself, principal and interest, to any amount you thought proper to name," said

he. "There was a regular sack of doubloons below some rugs in a corner, and many a pretty thing besides—how come by, we need not have troubled ourselves to inquire."

"Well, the fact is," quoth Frank, "I had other matters than the doubloons in my head at the time."

"And I cannot say I wonder at it," said Colonel Marston.

"But is nothing to be done about that ruffian left bound in the hut?" inquired Wilmot.

"We shall communicate with the authorities at Marbella, as we pass," replied Marston; "though as to justice being done upon the man we need expect nothing of the sort. My opinion is, you will see your friend Diez flourishing in full force at the next high-class *corrida* you go to witness."

"And if his costume is extra superb," interposed Basil, "you can reflect with a glow of satisfaction—'To this I contributed.'"

Beguiling the way, as best they could, in this manner, and without encountering any incident to vary the monotony of the road, they continued their ride for some hours, chiefly along the low ground by the sea-shore, with occasional deviations to the right where the path diverged inland, and the rocky nature of the coast rendered the beach impassable. By this time, the moon began to pale, and a faint gray tinge of a warmer shade than hitherto to glimmer about the eastern horizon. Gradually the dawn stole onwards, as, turning round from time to time in the saddle, Frank watched delightedly its beautifying influence on the



mountain peaks in the rear. These became shot with rich and gorgeous tints like those on the neck of a dove, the gray turning to brown, the brown to purple, the purple to crimson, until a vivid track of flame lighted up the loftiest ridges, as the bright luminary himself, rising over the dark-blue waters, shot a broad pathway of flickering gold across their bosom from east to west, and sent the shadows of night in pale-gray wreaths of vapour to seek a lingering refuge in the gloomiest recesses of the hills.

It was broad daylight, and getting very warm, when they arrived at the small coast-town of Marbella. Here Marston and Thornfield recommended Wilmot to lie down and seek a repose of "forty winks, or so," which could be afforded well enough, they having certain business to transact with the judicial powers, which might be more or less tedious, according as the *alcalde* was more or less an ass. This was the way in which Basil, at all events, expressed it; and Frank, who was really tired, readily enough agreed to lie down and court a few minutes' slumber during their absence. As for them, the idea of repose never seemed to enter their heads. Marston said he would make up for all present deficiencies when they got to Gibraltar, and Basil swore that he had slept in his saddle as soundly as there was any necessity for, ever since sunrise.

Frank's brother-officers, it appeared, had started thence at daylight; and Fastman, borrowing the requisite amount from some of them to reimburse the muleteers, had joined the cavalcade to Gibraltar, retaining the steed he had

hitherto used, on the understanding that the guide would be answerable for its safe restoration.

It so happened that the *alcalde* of Marbella was not only an intelligent but a reasonable and good-humoured individual, for, though he was roused out of his bed by our two travellers at a very much earlier hour than was his wont, he listened patiently, and even with interest, to their narrative of what had taken place, and, after a very little demur, pronounced them at liberty in the meantime to continue their journey.

They would not refuse him their word of honour, he suggested, that, if necessary, they would be forthcoming as witnesses upon the probable judicial investigation. As for the two robbers, they were well known in this part of the country; and one of them being past all further mischief, while some chance existed of the other's coming to the *garrote*, why—the *señores Ingleses*, in the magistrate's opinion, deserved well of Andalusia.

Thus, the matter being comfortably arranged, and Frank rising refreshed from a couple of hours' slumber, the travellers despatched a hasty but tolerably-cooked breakfast, consisting of chocolate and an omelette, and started off on the road to Gibraltar. The distance they had to traverse was not above forty miles, but Thornfield was of a calibre which rendered him no trifle on the back of a horse. Marston was also above the average size and weight, and the steeds of all three soon began to shew most unequivocal signs of not being so fresh as they might be. Consequently, what with roads of wonderful and fearful

construction, (or non-construction,) halts here and there to bait, and the necessity for avoiding a complete breakdown, it was close upon gunfire when, wearied and travel-soiled, they arrived at the gates of the fortress. Here, after Frank had pressed his companions to come to mess, and they had laughed heartily at the notion, and recommended *him* to go to bed, they separated for the evening, and retired each to his respective quarters. It will speedily be seen why we cannot yet bid our friends, Marston and Thornfield, wearied as they are, good-night.

## CHAPTER XX.

### WHO COMES THERE?

COLONEL THOMAS CLINTON arrived at Gibraltar, from England, a few days previous to the events which are chronicled in the preceding chapter. His voyage had been barren of incident; the weather, on the whole, good; and his companions very much the sort of people who are usually to be found availing themselves of such mode of transit. There were a Gibraltar merchant, his wife and two children; the latter delighted with the prospect of any change, as they had been, six months before, in turning their faces in the opposite direction—*Paterfamilias*, not ill pleased to find himself *en retour* to that spot where he had established his *lares*, and where he fondly imagined himself to be "somebody;" the mother, like most mothers, content to seek happiness where the others were pleased to join in the quest. There were a brace of travelling Gauls, one brisk, inquisitive, voluble—the other morose and taciturn, making the steward's ignorance of his tongue a personal matter, and pronouncing everything set before him in the way of food "*très mauvais*;" a Spaniard, proceeding as far as Cadiz, who appeared to rejoice in the possession

of but one *camisa*. Indeed, he himself proclaimed the fact, which was unnecessary, in so far as, setting apart the eccentricity of pattern which distinguished as much as could be seen of that garment, (and we vouch for nothing further,) there could be no mistake about the smear of brown soup which Tom Clinton saw descend thereon in the course of the owner's first and last performance at dinner, and which flourished there undisturbed, albeit half merged in the surrounding obscurity, on the reappearance of the latter off the harbour of Cadiz.

There was no doubt as to the hospitality which awaited our traveller on his disembarkation at Gibraltar. Thomas Clinton and Lascelles Morley had been friends and brother-soldiers in days long gone by. It was indeed with the utmost difficulty that the former carried his point in establishing himself at the Club Hotel. Were not Morley's quarters ready to receive him as a thrice-welcome guest—that spare room, which was seldom untenanted, and was at all times open to those who possessed a tithe part of Clinton's claims to hospitality? But Thomas had his own reasons for preferring to be at the hotel at present, and he at last succeeded in effecting a compromise, by agreeing to consider himself as Morley's guest in all but house-room. Clinton was somewhat annoyed to find that he whom he sought was, at the moment, absent from the rock, and would have gone on to Malaga in pursuit, but for his host's representation that, in so doing, he might not improbably cross that wandering knight on his way back, and that under no circumstances could his return be a matter of

many days' delay. So he was fain to combat his impatience, and devote himself to renewing his old acquaintance with the many objects of interest around and near him, for which every facility was placed at his disposal by Colonel Morley.

Old comrades of the —th, *you know who it is* I am feebly trying to portray under that *nom de guerre*; and I ask even those few among you who may have deemed, or still deem, that you had cause of complaint against him in the administration of his office—are there not bright associations called up by that name, of joyous spring days; unclouded hours of greenwood revelry, where *Atra Cura*, the black horseman, missed his clutch at our crupper as we started, and lingered behind, only once more to be foiled by the genial flow of *his* sparkling humour at the festive evening board? If those assemblages were made at times something more than festive, the reckless and ungoverned spirits of those who made them so were alone to blame; nor were the latter slow at any time to come to *him* for aid and counsel in the difficulties to which their folly gave rise.

Clinton, as we have hinted, was no stranger to the rock, though many long years had elapsed since there he had played his *rôle* as a happy subaltern. And all now looked so much the same—and yet how altered! He could not tell wherein the difference lay; no wonder—it was in himself—that unsearchable depth which human gaze can rarely fathom. But the faces—ah! “the old familiar faces!” whose shadows rose in the mirror of Clinton’s heart—

where were they? Not all sleeping their long sleep in divers lands, as the dart of the grim king chanced to find them; a few were still actively following out their several missions; some settled down, as they called it, and *they* also looking back to those days as on a dream gone by; a drama played out, and shrouded behind its curtain. The stage was now filled by other performers, and those of olden time sat silently before the lights, and sneered at the paint and tinsel.

A rather small party, if not a select one, was sitting down to dinner in the mess-room of the ——th, on the fourth or fifth evening after Clinton's arrival. Small it was, but secure from dulness, for Morley sat in his accustomed chair, and, unless there was good reason for it, *tristesse* could find no place within the range of his presence. And he had a friend by his side whom he valued, and to whom he sought to render this visit a pleasing reminiscence. No difficult task, for the one possessed a natural flow of spirits which was infectious, and the other, albeit grave of temperament, was genially disposed to accept such kind overtures in the spirit which dictated them, and to repay them with the grateful courtesy of a polished nature.

"Has anything been heard of our Malaga party?" demanded Morley, looking round, after pledging his guest in a first glass of sherry—the first and best—that following the soup, a pleasing harbinger of others to come, none of which, however, quite equal their leader in charm—"Has nothing been heard of our wanderers?"

"I've just spoken to some of them," said an officer, who had come in rather late. "They're too much beat to come to mess, but they're all right—except Wilmot, by the by; he had managed to lose his party in some stupid way—so Fastman, of the County Bingo, told me—would go wandering among the hills at dusk, looking for a blacksmith to shoe his horse; and, by Jove! Fastman, who is not the man to inconvenience himself about anybody, seems to have quietly left him to his devices."

"Is that Mr Fastman's account of the matter?" asked Morley, drily.

"Yes; they two seem to have lingered, in the first place, behind the rest—so he says—something Frank had forgotten, or put off to the last moment. Fastman swears he stuck by him as long as he could, to see he came to no mischief; but I can't quite take in *that*."

"Is it young Wilmot of the D——shire family?" asked Clinton. "I know something of his parents. I trust there is no chance of harm having come to him?"

"Not a bit," replied the same officer who had hitherto spoken. "Those two fellows, Marston and Thornfield, had gone after him, it seems; a deuced sight more to be trusted than Fastman."

"True," said Colonel Morley; "we need not be anxious about our stray lamb, if they went on his track. Tom Clinton, I shall now have the pleasure of joining you in a tranquil glass of champagne. I think," continued he, in a low tone, "you will hear tidings before long of the object of your search."



Tom Clinton's meditations, in spite of the remonstrances of his observant host, began rather palpably to interfere with his appetite. Dinner, however, wore on, was ended, and "glasses sparkled on the board." These, in turn, gave place to the leaf of Havannah and the juice of the Mocha berry; but still Clinton was fidgety and nervous; when the officer on duty, who had been out collecting the tattoo reports, came in with fresh intelligence.

"All's well," said he, as he flung his sword down on a side-table; "the last instalment of travellers duly arrived as per invoice—Marston and Thornfield in good preservation, and Frank Wilmot slightly damaged."

"Drop the 'bagman,' like a good fellow," said Colonel Morley, "and tell us in plain terms what has happened—who is damaged, and how?"

"Why, Wilmot has come in with a knock on his forehead," answered the orderly officer. "Nothing to speak of—a cut about an inch long. O'Shane has looked at it, and he says it's of no consequence. As for how he came by it, I can't say; for he's dead-beat, and as sulky as a grizzly bear."

"Has Captain Basil Thornfield come into garrison, did you say?" asked Clinton, leaning forward anxiously.

"Thornfield and Marston both; and they're gone straight off to the Club Hotel; we'll hear all about it to-morrow, no doubt. Hunter! a glass of brandy and water, and a cigar."

"Morley, I shall ask leave to wish you good night,"

said Clinton, rising from his chair, and talking in a low tone—"I am really most anxious to see this man, and—I can't say how much I am obliged to you for allowing me to make a mystery of this business."

"Don't mention it, old fellow," said Morley, laughing; "you always had a mystery, don't you remember? By all means keep it till the favourable moment comes, and for ever, if you like; but you will scarcely see Thornfield on business to-night—better have a cigar—and I'd introduce you in the morning."

"Nothing more, thank you, Morley. I should like to look at our friend, even should I have no opportunity of addressing him. I have my credentials, you know, and—in short, good night, my dear fellow—I must be off, indeed."

Colonel Morley glanced round him somewhat ruefully. No chance of a rubber—not even of a "muff" rubber, that *dernier ressort* of the regular player. Of the half-dozen officers present, two were asleep on opposite sofas, two were busy over the backgammon board; the others were well-known ineffectives for the purpose in view. Julius Burton was one of these last; he was sitting as deep as he could thrust himself into an arm-chair, with his twinkling black eyes fixed sternly on vacancy; a very stiff black cravat with long ends twisted tightly round his throat, and a glass of brandy and water, sufficiently *prononcé* in hue, half-hidden by a match-case, on the chimney-piece beside him.

"Well, if you must go, you must," said Morley, with a

half-sigh. "I would accompany you, but my horse is ordered at eleven for the rounds. *Buena noche, caballero!*" and Clinton set off homewards.

He had a tolerably long walk before him; but the night was fine, the moon was shining brightly, and it would have been even enjoyable to one whose mind was not pre-occupied. As it was, his reflections probably shortened the way, rather than otherwise, and he was still deeply pondering the exact course he should adopt, when he passed through the Southport Gate, and entered upon the precincts of the town range.

"I will go by the line wall," thought he, "and escape the bother of those innumerable sentries."

Poor Tom! he reckoned without his host. Scarcely had he taken a dozen steps in the direction he had chosen, when, with startling abruptness, the clash of a musket butt met his ear, followed by the sharp interrogatory "Who comes there?"

There was something strange to Clinton's Saxon tympanum in the accents which thus arrested his progress, for they were Celtic, but the words were distinct enough, as was the figure, some twenty paces in advance, of him who uttered them, a tall Highlander with nodding black plumes, and his firelock at the position of "port," which, it may be necessary to inform certain of our readers, immediately precedes the menacing one "charge bayonets."

"Friend!" called out Clinton, in that impatient tone, which man, being reasonable, uses towards sentries, railway guards, and such-like vexatious individuals in the

execution of the duties laid down for them. Tom certainly did not mean it, but he was not always, when taken unawares, superior to convention, and besides he was interrupted by the challenge in an important train of thought.

"Friend!" repeated Colonel Thomas Clinton.

"There's nae freends here," was the response, in a querulous voice, like his own. "Ye maun say 'Offisher,' or 'Ayberdeen,'—tat's ta countersign,—or she canna let ye pass."

"But I am a stranger, my good man," urged Tom, who did not at once take in the man's meaning; "what am I to do?"

"Hoo! she disna ken. Ye can gang back be ta toon range; but ye canna pass alang ta line wall; except ye say 'Offisher' or 'Ayberdeen.'"

"Well, since you give me a choice," said Clinton, unable to help laughing, "'Officer,' then; it's no falsehood, after all."

The latter part of the question did not seem to disturb the guardian's equanimity.

"Pass, offisher, and all's well!" sung out he, shouldering arms with a clang, and resuming his promenade to and fro; while Clinton, highly amused, and now armed with the pass-word, proceeded without further let or hindrance towards the hotel.

An uncontrollable desire beset him to get his mission so far accomplished as to break the ice at all events with the

mysterious Thornfield, and fairly ascertain the efficacy of the credentials he carried with him.

"Has Captain Thornfield returned?" asked he, in as careless a tone as he could assume, of the slovenly waiter, who was lounging in the passage.

"Yes, sar; but the captain and Colonel Marston have gone to their rooms, for very tired;" said the man, who belonged to the mongrel race *ycleped* "rock scorpions," and spoke the two tongues, to which he possessed a sort of equal right, with similar imperfectness.

"There is no harm, I presume, in my asking to see him for one minute?"

"I don't know, sar—there is the door of his room, and the colonel's is just beyond. They both very tired, sar; ordered supper—nearly ready, sar."

"I will not detain him one second," said Clinton, preparing to mount the staircase towards the door in question, and feeling a slight palpitation as he ascended.

"*Venga!*—come in," sounded in deep tones from the interior of the chamber, in answer to Tom's modest rap.

He opened the door, and stepped in. A large man, who was sitting at the open window as he entered, got up from his seat, and came slowly forward.

"You are Captain Basil Thornfield?" asked Clinton.

"I am Basil Thornfield; and be your business what it may, I trust it will keep till to-morrow—I am not going to run away, sir, and I have just come from a ride of forty miles."

"I will not trouble you with more than three words; my name is Clinton—retired lieutenant-colonel—and I have come to look for you from Maudesley Hall, Dorsetshire."

"Ha! go on, sir—I may have leisure for what you have to say, after all."

"I shall merely ask leave, as a preliminary, to place in your hands," said Tom, fumbling in the breast of his coat, and producing the document he had received from Sir Ralph Maudesley, "this small packet."

The man-at-arms took one stride towards the light which stood on a small table in the centre of the room, and tore open the envelope.

A blow on the table from his clenched fist, which made the candlestick perform a sort of *pas seul*, attested Basil's recognition of the contents.

"It is so, then," asked Clinton; "you are prepared to"—

Basil Thornfield, without ceremony, cutting short this speech, and taking no notice of him who made it, strode hastily towards a pair of folding-doors in the inner wall of the apartment, and threw them open; a tall man, who was busy writing by the light of a lamp, looked up inquiringly. Clinton could see this from where he stood.

"Gilbert! Gilbert! you are wanted," cried Basil, hurrying up to the writer, and placing his hand upon his shoulder. "What is that letter—the application to the Turkish war minister? Give it me to light my pipe with."

Old fellow, the cruise is over—you will fetch port on the present tack."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, that you are in sight of land, and that the channel pilot has come on board. Stand by cable and hawser, old comrade—nothing remains for you now but to drift with the shore-current—HOME!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WILMOTS.

SIR RALPH MAUDESLEY had not, as may be presumed, spent a very agreeable time of it since the departure of his friend, on the one hand, and of his persecutor, on the other. He was inclined to torture himself with the dread of the latter's premature return, and resumption of his machinations, before he (Sir Ralph) should be armed and ready to encounter him. And how armed, after all? As a penniless man who is indifferent to the vicinity of a footpad! No very cheering reflection this, and Sir Ralph Maudesley was still grovelling among the things of earth, and could lift his vision no higher in the search for comfort. As time wore on, the nervous feeling which oppressed him naturally increased, and was again palpably affecting his bodily strength, which had previously shewed signs of improvement. At this juncture, it struck him that, were he to send the two ladies out of the way, he could not only better face the disagreeable work which was inevitable, but would be prepared to meet, without serious discomfiture, an untimely advent on the part of him whose schemes were, it was to be hoped, in a fair way of being thwarted.



Chance seemed to aid the baronet in this. An invitation from Lady Maudesley's persistent friend, Mrs Wilmot, arrived one morning, for her and her daughter to sojourn for a week or two, as their engagements should permit, at Wilmot's-Tower. She had heard, she said, with regret, that Lady Maudesley's health did not improve as she had hoped, during the summer season. Would not the bracing atmosphere of —shire (a seaside county) be likely to be beneficial? "We see too little of each other, dear Lady Maudesley," wrote the kind-hearted Mrs Wilmot, who well knew that their temporary estrangement was no act of volition on her friend's part; "do let me have the pleasure of initiating a better state of things between us, and breaking through the thin crust of ice which only wants time and indifference on our parts to become a serious barrier to our intercourse. Can Sir Ralph spare you? you know how glad Mr Wilmot would be were he to join you in the visit which, I insist upon it, you and Geraldine are about to pay us, but I fear this is more than we can reasonably expect. By the by, *entre nous*, Frank is safe with his regiment some thousand miles away, and we need not mention him at all, so if you are afraid of any foolish doings in that quarter—but I will not pursue this part of the question, and only mention it to shew that there need really be no reserve between us old people on that or any other subject which perplexes us." Thus went on for a page or so further, this outspoken personage, and Lady Maudesley read out such portion of the epistle to the listening Geraldine as she deemed expedient, though that

young lady silently wondered at the flush which arose to her mother's cheek during her first perusal of the document, and judged, not incorrectly, that she herself had cause to be specially interested in the matter withheld.

Now, her ladyship, having grave doubts as to the expediency of mentioning the matter at all to her better half, was considerably astonished at the palpable satisfaction displayed by him, on being made acquainted with the contents of the above letter. Lady Maudesley had, in fact, taken an opportunity when they were alone together, of reading the whole epistle from beginning to end, and was doubly, trebly surprised by the baronet's comments on that part of it which related to Frank.

"Hem—hem," said Sir Ralph, a little confused, but in widely-different strain from that she expected. "Ahem! I don't see why poor Frank's absence should be looked upon as an advantage. A very fine young man, and of the very highest principle, I am told. My dear, if there is any mistaken idea in Geraldine's head or your own that I object to being on the friendliest terms with all and sundry at Wilmot's-Tower, I—hem—request that no such *imaginary*"—(this with a strong emphasis)—"purely imaginary obstacle may be suffered to obstruct the best possible relations between us."

"My dear, I really was under the impression," stammered poor Lady Maudesley, too much taken by surprise to realise the pleasure this harangue might have afforded her; "I certainly thought"—

"No such thing," pursued Sir Ralph, peevishly, as her

ladyship paused for words in which to express herself. "Circumstances which may, perhaps, no longer exist"——

"O Ralph, do tell me all. If you knew what pleasure, what life it may be to me"——

"Hush! my dear Lucy; not quite so fast. Only, circumstances, as I say, may have changed, rendering a certain demeanour on my part unnecessary. And—a—the fact is," said the baronet, reverting to his *coin d'avantage* as an injured individual, "women never know how to make allowances for the influence of mental disquietude in a man."

Poor Lucy! how gladly would she have accepted a share of that disquietude as a legitimate burden, and how infinitely lighter it would have been to her than that which followed upon confidence withheld!

"Indeed, Ralph, I have never blamed you," said she, gently.

The baronet's conscience twinged him. "I know it," said he, taking her hand between his own, as he stopped in his promenade beside the couch on which she reclined. "I am not such a—hum—a brute—as to shut my eyes to that. But come; you shall go to Wilmot's-Tower—you and Gerry; and you will take every kind expression from me to the family, and say how glad I should be to accompany you were it not that—hem—pressing business detains me here."

"Could you not join us by and by? You know how happy Mr Wilmot would be."

"Ha—hum," responded Sir Ralph, with a sort of groan.

"As for that, I—don't—quite feel—certain;" then, noticing the look of surprise on his wife's countenance, he hastily changed the subject.

"This place is looking very beautiful," said he, moving towards one of the windows, and gazing out upon the rich autumnal landscape; "very beautiful indeed."

There was something this morning about the baronet's tone which his lady could not make out at all. It was mournful, but with more decision in it than was usual to him.

"But we need not be long away, if we do go," said her ladyship, cheerfully. "We shall not lose much of its beauty by borrowing a fortnight now, when autumn can scarcely be said to have begun."

"Could you bear to leave it for ever?"

He was standing now with his back to the light, gazing upon her features, while his own were in shadow, so that she could not see their working distinctly. But there was something in his voice which forbade her to treat the subject lightly.

"Bear it? Yes, indeed. If unaccompanied by changes of far greater moment, a mere change of residence could not affect my—happiness."

The sigh which delayed the utterance of the last word would come, in spite of her. Sir Ralph understood it.

"I believe you would be happier; I believe and trust you *will*," said he, with his better nature warring within him. "Then suppose we were to find it necessary to leave

Maudesley Hall, and to go abroad—to Florence, perhaps—and look for our old villa?”

“My dearest Ralph, only tell me that there is no—no—that there is nothing *wrong* connected with our leaving Maudesley Hall, and I will hail such a change as you suggest with joy. And I will answer for Geraldine. Yes; let us go, if we shall leave behind us that sorrow, against which I could neither struggle for myself nor for you, not knowing whence it came, nor what was its nature.”

“And I have been pursuing an *ignis fatuus* all my life,” groaned Sir Ralph Maudesley to himself, “when my own path lay fair and broad enough before me! But it was for her, for them, I acted. I have been weak and blind rather than guilty.”

Apply that flattering unction to your spirit, Ralph Maudesley. It is not your good genius which suggests the reasoning, but it is true to your nature, and let it pass.

“I see Geraldine coming down the terrace-walk. Talk with her, dearest, over your arrangements for travelling, but say nothing of what I have hinted about a permanent change, at least not yet; and—and—be very civil to the Wilmots.”

“And you,” said Lady Maudesley, following him as he retired, and laying her hand gently on his arm,—“you will not be quite alone?”

“No; do not disturb yourself about that. Wright will be here in a day or two, and Mr Docksay will bear me company till he comes, his own better half, as you are

aware, having gone to Brighton. And now, good-bye for an hour or two. You will have made your arrangements, and written to Mrs Wilmot, probably, by the time we meet at dinner."

The two ladies now talked over as much of the preceding conversation as Lady Maudesley felt herself entitled to divulge. Geraldine, with the usual inconsistency of very young ladies, was actually inclined to give her voice against the visit to Wilmot's-Tower; but she acquiesced, nevertheless, in a plan from which her mother appeared to hope for good results, and in the solitude of her own chamber pondered still further on the possible tendency of her father's altered demeanour.

"And it will be delightful to meet dear Bell and Georgy Wilmot without constraint once more," said the deceitful one, aloud, as if that remark really summarised the results of her half-hour's meditation.

The two ladies accordingly departed within the course of the next few days, to pay the promised visit at Wilmot's-Tower, where, if anything had been required to prove the sincerity with which the family there had pressed upon them their hospitality, it would have been found in the simple cordiality of the welcome accorded. The bluff warmth of old Mr Wilmot—a genuine specimen of the old English squire; the unaffected anxiety with which his better half studied the change which was only too evident in Lady Maudesley's features since they had last met; the tearful embrace of Bell, and voluble joy of Georgina Wilmot, in accordance with their respective temperaments,

were too plainly genuine to be mistaken for a moment. Lady Maudesley and Geraldine felt that the estrangement, which had so long existed between the families, was not attributed to them, nor indeed accepted as cause for bitter resentment in any direction. If they had known the whole truth, they would have been aware how large a mixture of pity there was in the feelings with which the Wilmot's-Tower family had noted the rising of the cloud between them. In the honest simplicity of their nature, the two seniors had been superior even to the dread that the world might put harsh construction on their persistent refusal to be kept at a distance. The *mens conscia recti* bore Mr Wilmot out even in this. "Pay court to the heiress for Frank's sake?" said he to his wife, in discussing the matter; "let the world say so if the world thinks it worth its while. I happen to know that Frank Wilmot has no need to creep into the family of any man in Britain. Where he goes with any such intent, he will go with head erect—*ad sidera tollens vultus*—eh?" said the old gentleman, floundering somewhat in his classic reminiscences, but bold in the presumed darkness of his wife's mental vision in such matters; "with shoulders square and head erect, ma'am, or he's no son of mine."

The Wilmot family had also taken wondering note of the terms upon which Mr St Alban was seeking to establish himself at Maudesley Hall; but the idea of anything serious impending in that quarter was indignantly scouted by old Wilmot. "Maudesley has much about him that is incomprehensible to a rough plain man like me," said the

squire, in allusion to the above subject ; “ but his breeding as a gentleman, and his sense of what is due to his position, not to mention the man’s natural affection for his child, are guarantee against anything so hideously ruinous as some busybodies would insinuate to be on the cards. If it were by any strange revolution of things possible, I would almost give my aid—certainly my good wishes—to any spirited young fellow (except Frank, for reasons I have occasionally stated) who would make a moonlight flitting with that charming lass, poor thing, and place her beyond the reach of such a fate. But it’s nonsense—utter nonsense—enough to raise all the old Maudesleys out of their nooks in the quiet mausoleum. The man’s a weak, vacillating creature ; but he’s a gentleman.”

As for Geraldine herself, the thought of Mr St Alban’s suit almost ceased at the present juncture to give her any uneasiness at all. There had been in her mind, connected with that personage, a presage of evil, which weighed upon it heavily enough ; but it was the fear of serious estrangement between herself and her parent—a vague undefined dread of certain mysterious consequences, which, like the sword of Damocles, hung suspended over his head ; but she had never contemplated for one moment, seriously, such a mode of escaping from the dilemma as he had more than once half suggested. Become the wife of Geoffrey St Alban ! Never—never—never ! The idea was so grotesquely horrible as actually to obviate serious alarm. And she only put aside the idea of Frank Wilmot till better



days should come, and locked it out of sight, and kept it warm somewhere in the region of her heart.

The time passed merrily at Wilmot's-Tower. The ladies drove about, and rode, and scrambled through "bosky dells," and sat panting on sunny hill-sides, and wandered along dreamy expanses of sea-beach; and Geraldine seemed only now to realise how beautiful a world it is we live in when lighted up with the flame of human kindness. She had soon, as formerly, no reserve with her young companions.

"And do you really see so few people at Maudesley Hall, Gerry?" asked the lively Georgina Wilmot, looking wonderingly and pityingly in the fair young face beside her own.

"Very few indeed," replied Geraldine. "Papa is always talking of filling the hall at the proper season—when there is shooting, I suppose, and that sort of thing; but then, you know, mamma is not strong—and something comes in the way—and no one comes but Mr Docksay, and perhaps Sir James Bellingham, and—and—that"——

"I know," whispered Georgina, as her friend stammered and looked confused; "I know who you mean, Gerry—the ogre—but he must look for food elsewhere. We will keep you safe till the trumpet sounds in the distance, and the bold knight on his milk-white charger comes prancing to the rescue."

"Thanks, Georgy; but I am not a bit afraid of the ogre, so am in no hurry for the advent of the knight," replied

Geraldine, who began to fear they were getting on dangerous ground.

"Hurry? no, I hope not; I am older than you by a twelvemonth at least, and I see no sign of mine yet;" said the volatile young lady, and the conversation flowed easily and naturally into half-a-dozen other channels.

We may now leave our two gentle friends with easy minds under their present guardianship, satisfied to know that they are happier than they have been for many months, and that no influence will be exerted over them here but that exercised by cordial good-will over grateful hearts.

Sir Ralph Maudesley and Mr Docksay wiled away the hours, in the meantime, after their peculiar fashion, at Maudesley Hall. They took long walks together, during which the worthy rector discoursed fluently and didactically, as was his wont, on many topics, and his companion mechanically supplied the necessary short links in the conversation, ruminating the while on subjects which lay nearer his heart than the system of poor-rate assessment, and improvement of the general moral status of the lower classes, and so forth. We cannot blame him; let any of our readers place themselves in his situation, and say if his abstraction was to be wondered at. On the occasion of one of those walks, the two gentlemen, entering the park by the west lodge, encountered old Sandy Rutherford, who was standing, as usual, by the little wicket gate of what he called his "yaird," which was now gaudy with dahlias and such-like autumn flowers. Indeed, those and mari-

golds were Sandy's special favourites of the floral tribes, and filled his parterres pretty much to the exclusion of aught else, excepting a sprinkling of thyme, lavender, and such-like fragrant herbs of small general estimation. Sir Ralph usually contrived to get past Sandy, on the occasions of their encountering each other, with scant though not ill-natured greeting, for Sandy was wont to trample ruthlessly on the baronet's corns, (figuratively speaking;) whether purposely or otherwise could scarcely be ascertained, but likely enough to be the former, for Sandy was old, and presumed thereon; was rheumatic, and thereby cross; and, finally, was possessed of savings, which rendered him independent, to use his expression, of "onybody's" humours, meaning thereby, indifferent to the reception of his own on the part of other people. The Reverend Otho, however, was an impediment to Sir Ralph in his contemplated system of manœuvre, for he had a word for everybody, and rather specially enjoyed a gossip with Sandy, whom he looked upon as an original, chiefly, probably, on the ground that he could rarely make out more than half of his meaning.

"Weel," said Mr Docksay, who piqued himself on his proficiency in the Scottish tongue, as studied principally under the professor before him, "weel, Sandy, hoo d'ye doo'to-day?"

"Middlin'—jist middlin'," said Sandy, fretfully. "I'm sair plaguit wi' thae rheumatics—I canna get peace to read my Bible for them, or onything," continued he, suiting, as behoved an ancient courtier, his conversation to his company.

"I see you can read the newspapers, though," pursued the rector, glancing at a copy of the *Haverton Telegraph* which half protruded from the pocket of Sandy's brown frock coat.

"The papers—ou ay, when I get a spell o' ease like—or Nanse, she reads them till me whiles—an' a bonny hash she maks o' them; but I got the len' o' this ane to read about the muckle fire there's been in Haverton. Your honors would hear tell o' that, nae doot?"

"Yes," said Sir Ralph Maudesley, "we have just come from the spot,—a great destruction of property, though chiefly belonging to one individual."

"Ay," quoth Sandy, leering cunningly, "ill-gotten gear never thrive yet wi' him that got it. Brasspenny was in an unco hurry to foreclose, as ye ca'd, and mak thae houses his ain that he had lent siller on to young Featherhead; and they say Brasspenny kenned best what for Featherhead wasna ready wi' the bawbees in time—an' see what's come o't. But that writer chiel' would smoor his brither, if he could get siller by'd—a' body kens that o' him."

"Come along, we shall be late for dinner," interrupted the baronet, hurriedly consulting his watch; "half-past five"—

"Half after five,—will it tak ye twa hours to gang ower twa mile or less?" sarcastically inquired Sandy, who had been in hopes of a lengthened gossip with the rector. "But I'm sayin', yer honour Sir Ralph, ye're no angry at my misca'in' Brasspenny? I ken he's unco neigh-

bour-like wi' Monkshood Vale; but though you an' *him's* 'chief'\* thegither, that's no to say"—here Sandy's voice was lost in the distance, and the two gentlemen proceeded homewards in silence, Mr Docksay seeing that his companion was something put out, though puzzled as to the cause thereof.

On the second or third day after the worthy rector's arrival, the express train from London brought no less a person to the hall than our old friend Mr Wright, of Wright and Thoroughpace, Claw Lane, the Poultry, who came by special invitation, and had timed his advent to suit certain events of which he had had private intimation from another quarter which shall be nameless.

We have never made quite plain, as far as we remember, the exact understanding which subsisted between the above gentleman and Sir Ralph Maudesley. It will appear, however, in the course of the following colloquy, which took place between them on the evening of the day after Mr Wright's arrival, the rector having taken his departure for the sphere proper of his own labours. Sir Ralph and his legal adviser, having concluded a rather silent meal, now sat one on each side of the fire which burned in the grate even at that period of the year; for, somehow or other, the vast old dining apartment of Maudesley Hall was never free from chilliness. Decanters and glasses stood on a small horse-shoe table between the two, and Mr Wright filled his unpressed, for he loved wisely and well a moderate glass of old port wine. Sir Ralph

\* *Anglice*—Friendly.

followed his example. After a little very loose skirmishing, the latter dashed *in medias res*. It was fitting that Mr Wright, whose discretion was beyond a doubt, should now be made acquainted with the actual state of affairs.

"Hem!" said the baronet; "you are no doubt prepared to learn, Mr Wright, the nature of the occasion which has induced me to desire your presence."

"*Semper paratus*, sir," quoth the lawyer. "This port's no unlike some I've got of my own down bye at Ealing. There's very little of the sort to be met in with—more's the pity."

"I am glad you like it. Mr Wright, I am going to disclose certain matters which will surprise, and, perhaps, shock you; hem! hem! Will you fill your glass, and pass the decanter this way?"

"All in good time," quoth Mr Wright, detaining the wine with one hand, and producing with the other his snuff-box, which he laid on the table beside him. "Take time, and don't flurry yourself, whatever it may be; as for surprise and that—I'm not so easy surprised—or shocked either."

"But this is something more than you could possibly have dreamed of—something affecting, we will suppose, the very position which I occupy in this house."

"That's an unpleasant affair for yourself, Sir Ralph Maudesley; but I see not wherefore it should either surprise or shock me to any unconscionable degree. The worst that could happen to me would be losing the factorship, and I've been thinkin' seriously o' givin' up busi-

ness, and goin' back to end my days in 'Auld Reekie'—so say away, and spare not."

Sir Ralph did not know exactly what to make of the lawyer's avowed indifference to the tenor of the unbroached subject; it is not in nature to bear such plain dealing without a certain measure of indignation; yet, if every one of our acquaintance who cares not in his heart whether we sink or swim, were to proclaim the fact, where would be the circle of society in which we are content to move? So Sir Ralph Maudesley gulped down a slight rising of the gorge, and proceeded with a sickly attempt at a smile.

"You are a hard dry man of business, Wright—no use expecting sympathy from you, I see."

"That I cannot say till I hear wherefore it is demanded," replied the lawyer; "but at any rate, I'll promise ye honest counsel, bearing fair market value, for what ye'll have to pay."

"With that, then, I must be content. Will you pass the wine?" His request was acceded to this time, and Sir Ralph filled and drank a bumper. "My relations with Captain Basil Thornfield must have occasioned you some perplexity at times?"

"Perplexity? not a bit of it. Your directions were clear and precise—to pay a certain sum quarterly in such shape as might be indicated. I never had any trouble about it whatever."

"We'll let that question pass—that is not what I meant. Mr Wright, you *will*, perhaps, feel some slight

surprise when I inform you that this Thornfield is by no means devoid of honourable feeling."

"I *am not* surprised at all."

"That he is an honester man than—myself." The baronet paused, covered his eyes with the palm of one hand, and expected some remark of deprecation, or at all events of interest, in what was to follow. None came—there was a sound as of the cracking of nuts, and nothing further.

"D——n it, I will shilly-shally no longer," thought the baronet, sitting up in his chair, and looking half angrily towards his unperturbed companion. "He shall have the whole story, so far as it is necessary, and let him then say his say."

"This man—Thornfield—has lately—has lately confided to me an astounding revelation. Nothing less than that my brother Charles left behind him at his decease a son—a son born in wedlock."

Mr Wright nodded.

"Did he—did Thornfield never hint to you such a circumstance?"

"As that Sir Charles left a son, who at the present time exists? Never."

"I did not say he existed at the present time," quoth Sir Ralph, actually alive to the pleasure of catching the cautious man tripping, in the midst of the agitation caused to himself by the recital.

"Were he not so," quoth the lawyer coolly, helping himself to a pinch of snuff, "his having been in existence



could be nothing to you, it being impossible, in the nature of things, that he in his turn could have left progeny. How old could the laddie be? Sixteen—the thing's oot o' the question."

Mr Wright had not, however, been quite so cautious as usual, and he felt it.

"Let that pass. According to Thornfield he is alive, and likely to live. He must now be about the age of my Geraldine, perhaps slightly less. Now, Mr Wright, may not this story be a fiction?"

"In law, no doubt, it may. In reason—knowing something of Basil Thornfield—I am inclined to believe what he maintains to be fact."

"I will not deceive you, Mr Wright; I have the same feeling myself; and it is to meet the parties in question, and examine their proofs, that I have summoned you here."

"Quite so," and the lawyer ruminated with a slightly improved expression of countenance. His coolness would have been quite astounding, were it not quite professional, and in accordance with the nature of the man.

"Now, Mr Wright," pursued Sir Ralph, after a fresh application to the decanter, "ahem! granting all this to be as stated, and my possession terminated," (here the poor baronet could not repress a groan,) "my tenure of the rank and estates at an end—the young man—the minor—properly installed; I naturally, as it appears to me, assume the office of guardian and trustee?"

"Doubtless—that is, supposing no directions to have been left on the subject by Sir Charles."

"That is simply out of the question."

"There are none; very well. The next thing is to ascertain what relations the lad may have on the other side of the family—the mother's. The guardianship might lie between you and them."

"The fact is—as far as we can make out—he *has* been actually under the care of a maternal uncle; but I should imagine my claims to be superior in law."

"Law's a queer thing, Sir Ralph Maudesley—whiles there's great stress laid on collateral circumstances, and whiles no—just according as the judge may look at the matter; and it would be advisable to keep the business out o' the Court of Chancery, I suppose."

"Good heavens! yes. I wish to have the affair settled according to its moral aspect—according to equity, but—having gone so far, I will be perfectly open with you, Mr Wright—and, for God's sake, place yourself as far as you can, in my position, and do what you can for me—what about the back reckonings?"

The man of business, as we know, was far from being devoid of feeling, though he was impatient of deviation from his own standard of rectitude, which was tolerably strict, though eccentric, according to the world's view, at times. He did not respect Ralph Maudesley in the aggregate, but he respected his feelings as a husband and father.

"Sir Ralph," said he, gravely, "this is a very extraordinary story—though ye canna expect me, wha hae been a man o' business in large practice for thirty years, to be

astonished at anything—let that be. But I may say that, viewing everything connected with the case—the absence (hem!) of malice in keeping the rightfu' heir frae his possessions, and the difficulty which he might have, and which you, an honourable man, may do much to smooth, in proving his title in a court of law—and (this in your ear) a' I hae been able frae time to time to glean from Basil Thornfield himself, (and ye'll find *he's* been hitherto the real and actual guardian—ha! hum,) takin' a' this, I say, into consideration, I feel in a measure authorised to predicate that the settling o' the matter will be made pleasant and comfortable to all parties concerned; that is, if ye're in earnest about your ain share in the winding up."

"I cannot help feeling that in thus speaking, Mr Wright," said the baronet, after a pause, "you must be rather exceeding your powers—pardon me; but neither can I help deriving some comfort from your words, and I am very thankful to you. I have reserved nothing—ahem!—nothing that is essential to the winding-up, as you term it, and I will do my duty therein, so help me God, for what remains, as an honest man."

"Stick to that, and defy the powers of darkness, Sir Ralph—for Sir Ralph ye are yet only way—and I'll not desert ye, in so far as my knowledge of the law, at the back of my real regard for your wife and bairn, can avail to help ye," and the two gentlemen shook hands across the table, and shortly afterwards adjourned, each to his own apartment, the one much relieved to have got so far

through the matter, the other with a somewhat softened feeling in his breast towards his unhappy client.

Next morning brought two despatches for Sir Ralph Maudesley, each of which in turn brought a vivid flush to his brow. He handed them both to Mr Wright, who sat munching his toast and unfolding the *Times*, which had been laid before him, and who merely nodded, after perusing the letters, and resumed his study of the leading article.

One was a short note from Mr Geoffrey St Alban, dated from Hull, announcing his forthcoming advent, and his hope to find the question he had propounded at starting definitively settled according to his wishes, it being impossible for him, on account of circumstances connected with his future arrangements, to wait longer for a decisive answer. By the day after to-morrow he would come in person to receive it.

The other was dated Southampton, and was in the handwriting of worthy Thomas Clinton. It was even more brief than the former, and merely stated that he had arrived in England, bringing with him such living proof of Thornfield's veracity as must carry conviction "anywhere." Thornfield and the others were with him, and a couple of days would see the whole party at Maudesley Hall.

Here, then, was the bane—and here the antidote. An antidote still, though it was not pleasant to the eye, nor was likely to be either sweet to the palate, nor all at once soothing in its effects. Sir Ralph made up his mind to

await the events of the next two days passively, if not with equanimity, and the lawyer and he saw each other only at meals, and made what shift they could to talk thereat on indifferent subjects; for it was no part of Mr Wright's plan to initiate fruitless discussions on matters of business, while Sir Ralph had a settled conviction that the man of law knew, and had for some time known, as much as he himself did of the matter, if not a great deal more. But this conviction was to him now a matter of comfort instead of uneasiness, though he was far from wishing to press discussion on the subject, for he could not tell how far back this knowledge on the lawyer's part, if it existed, might have found its origin, or where it ended.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE PLOT THICKENS.

SHORTLY after noon on the second day after that last treated of, three individuals of the male sex emerged from the booking-office of the Great Northern Railway, on to the platform thereto appertaining, in rear of a moderate amount of luggage; some parts of which bore evidence of having travelled a good deal, and of having been originally designed for that purpose. A perfect patchwork of labels, most of them foreign, and sundry private marks of continental hotels, bedecked these articles, and distinguished them from the general mass of luggage around, which suggested more or less the customary exodus at this season of the year towards the "happy hunting-grounds" in the north. The great body of grouse-killers had gone sometime previously, but there were still many whom circumstances of divers sorts had detained until now, and the platform was pretty well filled with these and their impedimenta. In the general bustle and confusion our friends attracted little notice, and yet there was something about them which might have demanded something more than a passing glance. Perhaps this remark would scarcely

apply to one of them, who was, after all, only a specimen, as far as could be seen, of the conventional club gentleman, of middle age, and military training, but the other two would have caused the passers-by in most instances to turn round and gaze, and did so, until whelmed in the vortex of the platform's occupants aforesaid. The first was Colonel Thomas Clinton of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, when at home; the others were Gilbert Marston and Basil Thornfield, of the wide, wide world, and boasting no home at all, as far as we can tell.

"Just in time, I am glad to perceive," Colonel Clinton had said, on entering the booking-office. "There will be a good many going north by this train, and it would be inconvenient to find one's-self among a crowd of friends just at present."

He was not destined quite to attain his object of getting stowed away in a carriage without recognition. A tall man in a shooting dress of Scotch tweed, who was dragging a couple of obstinate-looking pointers towards the carriage set apart for such four-footed passengers, looked up and hailed him as he passed.

"Hollo! Tom Clinton, where the deuce have *you* been these hundred years? Going north? Wait till I get these brutes off my hands, and I'll shew you a jolly carriage, full of fellows, all smokers, and first-rate company. Hold on a bit, old fellow!"

"All right, Jack Lutrell," Clinton shouted after the struggling guardsman, who, having apparently quarrelled with his servant on some point connected with the management of

the dogs, was obstinately refusing aid in the matter, though the man, with a sort of half-deprecating expression of countenance, followed closely upon his steps, as though anxious to be in the way when his services should be found to be indispensable. "Glad to see you, Jack; but I'm sorry I can't join you—engaged, old fellow—another time."

Clinton and Marston now got somewhat hastily into a carriage, which, by virtue of a lady having secured one of the seats, was comparatively at a discount with the sportsmen.

"But where is Basil?" suddenly asked the latter gentleman.

"He was at my shoulder this very minute," replied Clinton, peevishly enough. "Ah! yonder he is half-way down the platform—and who the deuce has he picked up now?"

Marston looked, and could not answer the question. Basil's acquaintance was a sufficiently remarkable-looking person. A rather tall, thin personage, wearing a low-crowned hat, and a long-skirted square-cut coat, of a sombre brown colour, like that affected by Quakers. He might have been taken for one of that sect, but for the ample moustaches and snowy-white beard, which latter descended over his breast to a considerable length. He wore blue spectacles also, and carried a thick bamboo-cane with a horn handle, and a thin leathern strap depending therefrom.

"Some South-Sea missionary, I should say," resumed Clinton; "but where can Captain Thornfield have formed such an acquaintance?"



Colonel Marston also took curious note of the stranger's appearance, but without the same amount of surprise with which his companion scanned it, from the carriage window.

"Basil has many strange acquaintances, here, there, and everywhere," said the former, settling himself in his corner.

The mysterious individual alluded to had accosted the man-at-arms as he was about to step into the carriage with one word in his ear, the effect of which was to make him wheel round as if thunderstruck, and thereafter, having given a moment's perusal to the stranger's features, to burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, in the midst of which the two embraced somewhat after the French fashion, and then walked off together down the platform, arm-in-arm. When the attention of the others was called to them, they were conversing together with much earnest gravity, returning towards the carriage door. Here, the bell having sounded, and an earnest appeal to the lingerers to take their places having been made by the guard, Basil and his friend once more embraced and parted, the former saying as he clambered in, "If it should be in my power—you understand—but it's next to impossible—*bon soir!*" The train now, with a shriek and a succession of grunts, got in motion, and fairly emerged from the railway precincts with its freight.

"Who was your friend, Basil?" asked Marston, but in that indifferent tone which says, "Answer or not as you please."

"Who? Oh, an odd sort of fellow—an enthusiast in his trade—wants help."

"A missionary, I presume," suggested Clinton.

"Exactly—always on the look out for stray sheep," returned Basil, grinning.

"I shall know him again, the next time I see him," pursued Tom.

"Just what you won't do, my good sir," grunted the man-at-arms, and the conversation dropped or flowed into other channels.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the train stopped at Haverton. The three gentlemen got out, and busied themselves collecting their luggage. The station-master, who had cause to know Basil Thornfield well, touched his hat joyfully, and seemed anxious to do anything he could to oblige.

"How's little Tom getting on, Statham?" asked the latter, kindly, after shaking hands with the man, who was quite in a flutter of apparent pleasure at seeing him.

"He be getting on finely, thanks to you, Captain Thornfield, sir—for he might ha' been layin' beside his poor mother now, if it hadn't been for your own self, captain—instead o' being in the Werkhampton bookin' office, at five shillin' a week, an' likely to get on, if he behaves himself—an' little fear o' that, sir, I'm thinkin'."

"I say, Tom! what the deuce—you ain't stoppin' here?" shouted Jack Lutrell from the window of his carriage, whence a sufficiently dense white vapour was slowly curling its way to the heavens. Jack was one of those persons who, when bent upon any particular project of excitement or pleasure, cannot realise the idea of a different

plan on the part of any one else. "You're comin' on, ain't you, by and by?"

"Perhaps, Jack; but not at present. Good-bye; and good sport to you," replied Tom, who was not in the vein for honest Jack's blundering platitudes, and off went the train on its way to "bonny Scotland."

"Will you have a cab, gentlemen, or take the omnibus, or"——the station-master seemed quite unwilling to confine his offers of assistance within the actual resources of the establishment.

"A cab to the hall? You'll be going to the hall, in course?"

"We will take a cab, Statham; but we are going to the hotel in the first instance."

"And the sooner we're *en route* the better," said Clinton, somewhat alarmed at the *empressement* of the grateful official. "Better attract as little notice as possible in this locality," continued he, in a low tone, "till our programme be played out; it will not take long to do."

"God bless you, Captain Thornfield, for a true gentleman, rough as you look," murmured the station-master, with something very like moisture in the eyes which followed the vehicle as it drove off.

Of the three gentlemen who shortly afterwards alighted at the door of the "Royal Arms" Thornfield seemed the best known to the master of the house, who, after welcoming him, and giving directions consequently upon the announcement that they should sleep there, handed to the

captain a note, with a sort of inquiring gesture towards the other two.

"The lad from the hall left it about an hour ago," said he. "I suppose"——

"All right," replied the man-at-arms; and he transferred the epistle to its proper owner, Colonel Thomas Clinton.

Having hastily opened and perused it, the latter conferred apart with Marston.

"It is from Wright," said he. "He addresses to me as a precautionary measure, though it was scarcely necessary. Had not we better see him? He tells me he cannot join us here, but will be at ——" (naming a small village on the confines of Maudesley Park, about a mile and a-half off) "at half-past five, alone."

"Certainly; let us go at once. No occasion for us all to go; Basil will await our return, which will be in less than an hour's time. Three words will suffice for our business with Wright; and the fewer the better."

"Shall we order a dogcart?"

"If I may decide the question, no; let us walk," said Colonel Marston, with the lawyer's despatch in his hand. "You see, Wright mentions having taken precautions against any awkward *rencontre*. You are scarcely known here, I think?"

"Scarcely—if at all. By all means let us walk," and the two gentlemen departed, leaving Thornfield to make what arrangements he thought fit for their joint comfort and refreshment on their return.

That gallant man having, with much gravity, listened to and approved of the whole of the landlord's suggestions with regard to dinner, and declined any further refreshment for himself at present but that afforded by his pipe, betook himself to the travellers' room to enjoy the same. Here he bestowed himself in an arm-chair, placed his nether limbs on the seat of another, and gave himself up to building castles in clouds of vapour. Poor Basil! Was he not rather pulling down sundry unsubstantial edifices, which had afforded him many happy hours, but were now tottering to their fall? His pipe actually went out, a sign of very strong abstraction indeed on his part, and of indulgence in musings which were not of a soothing nature. "Ay, the drama was indeed nearly played out, his companion Thespians were going home to spend a cheerful hour before retiring to rest, while he—he was still wanted for the tedious after-piece, ere seeking his couch in that dismal caravansary—the grave."

His reverie was broken by the sound of wheels drawing up at the door of the hotel, the usual bustle consequent upon an arrival, and the sound of a voice apparently ordering refreshment for man, or beast, or both. The new comer, having spoken his word or two to the landlord, now entered the room where Basil was seated, just as the latter, passing one broad hand across his brow, roused himself from a dreaming fit, which had gathered the skin thereof together in heavy folds. The two glanced at each other carelessly, as people do who meet in the common apartment of an inn. The stranger, who was in a travelling-

dress, having come, as he told the landlord, by a branch line from the eastern counties, and driven from a station some miles off, after a cursory look at the first occupant of the apartment, took up the *Haverton Telegraph*, which was lying on the table, and seated himself with his back to the latter. Strange to say, Basil Thornfield, ordinarily the most phlegmatic of men, as regarded the chance encounter of unknown faces, seemed, after a moment's perusal of this one's lineaments, to become unaccountably interested in the study. He had not, up to this time, shifted his position, nor altered his posture,—his chin supported by the knuckles of one hand, and his elbow on the table,—but a gradual strange light of intelligence was fast replacing the dull, mournful expression in his eye. When the other, who did not notice or was indifferent to his gaze, (his own glance having shewn him a total stranger,) sat down with his back half-turned towards him, Basil's interest visibly became heightened. He got up from his chair, and commenced a promenade up and down the room, humming to himself snatches of a then popular air, and keeping his gaze riveted, as far as he could without attracting actual observation, on the person of the individual with the newspaper. The latter, looking up once or twice, caught the eye of the man-at-arms thus fixed upon him, and at last became uneasy, or, at least, impatient. He looked at his watch, and gave vent to a few half-audible anathemas on the delay of the ostler-department outside. The excitement on Thornfield's countenance began to give place to a look of settled determination. He continued to walk

backwards and forwards, humming as he went, the melody being interrupted by sundry self-communings; as thus—

“‘Cheer, boys, cheer’—no time to be lost—‘away with idle sorrow’—a wig, I think; botheration—‘courage, true hearts’—but I’ll manage it—I can’t be mistaken—‘shall bear us on our way’—I’ll try a *ruse*—if I am wrong, he can’t eat me.”

“Pshut!” said he, suddenly, aloud, drawing forth his pocket-handkerchief, and flapping it about vigorously. “What the deuce—a wasp! Ha—hallo, Mr —; I beg pardon—the scamp’s in your whisker. Allow me,” and stepping briskly up to the stranger, Basil’s hand hovered for a moment in the vicinity, as far as an observer could have made out, of that gentleman’s cheek.

“Caught, by G—!” This profane exclamation burst from the lips of the former, simultaneously with an impatient ejaculation on the part of the latter, who jerked his head angrily away from the obtrusive fingers.

“What the devil, sir, do you mean?”

“Nothing—pardon—the creature’s gone, after all. But the devil, as you say, furnishes a case in point; they sting like fiends. Who would have thought it? Waiter,” continued Basil, as he hurriedly entered the bar-room, “who is that gentleman in there?”

“Mr St Alban, sir, of Monkshood Vale, close by.”

“Whew!” The man-at-arms, in the excess of his astonishment, dropped into a cane-seated chair, which creaked and quivered under his weight. “My stars! here are wheels within wheels! A *Bradshaw*, and pen

and ink. Quick, man! Great Northern—um—m—m,”—and after running his finger eagerly down a column, and pouncing upon the piece of information he wanted, Basil hastily scrawled a few lines, folded and addressed the note to Marston, and without further ado bolted off in the direction of the railway-station.

On the return of Marston and Clinton shortly afterwards, they found the public room deserted, and, to their utter astonishment, a note from their eccentric companion, which conveyed the mysterious piece of information, that “he was off back to London, having discovered an ingredient for their joint-stock caldron which would heighten the flavour of the hell-broth beyond belief;” and further, that “he would be with them again, if possible, that night, but, at the latest, next day, in time for the serving up thereof.”

With this message they were forced to be content, for where was the use of being vexed or put out by the doings of Basil Thornfield? Come back that night they knew he could not, on reference to the book of railway trains; and accordingly the evening passed away, and this new element of mystification reigned undisturbed by any glimmering of light.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DENOUEMENT.

WE have now come to the morning upon which Sir Ralph Maudesley, very pale and tremulous-looking, and with a suffused appearance about the region of the eyes, suggesting the agency of certain soporifics, which might have probably been very partially successful, sat in company with his legal adviser at the well-laden breakfast-table of Maudesley Hall. The abundance of creature-comforts thereon displayed only made more conspicuous the poor baronet's utter failure in attempting to do justice to them; as for Mr Wright, he was a man of simple habits in regard to diet, but he cracked his eggs and munched his toast very much as he always did, and looked as if he had slept well and arisen in good case—there being indeed no reason why he should have been otherwise affected. There was nothing impending which was not strictly in the way of his business—he might or might not have expected its occurrence; but at all events it would be rash to pronounce that events, of a nature equally startling, were at all scarce in the *répertoire* of his daily experience. A close observer, however, and one who knew him intimately,

might have detected a certain amount of abstraction in the lawyer's demeanour. He had taken possession of and unfolded the *Times*, as usual; but we can see, though Sir Ralph did not, but had an irritable feeling of not being sympathised with in his nervousness, that Mr Wright's eye wanders vaguely down the columns and up again; and that, having first lighted on the sheet of advertisements, it does not seek to wander further in search of matter more interesting. You are not meditating a trip to Paris by the South-Eastern line, Mr Wright, neither have you any yearning to visit Brussels, Cologne, or Frankfort, therefore what is there to you so absorbing in the fact that you may purchase a through ticket at a moderate rate to any of these places, and register your luggage all the way? And there is no want of exciting matter, either, in the paper, for things are beginning to wear a very queer aspect on the Russian and Turkish frontier.

There was almost total silence between the two as they sat there, for they had already discussed the impending *eclaircissement* in all its bearings; and the lawyer's manner did not at all encourage Sir Ralph to enter upon any sentimental train of reasoning on the subject. So he sat and gazed alternately out of the window at the tall elms which *were* there, and between the bars at the strange faces in the embers which were *not*, and felt his heart beat with an irregular, uncomfortable motion, and his whole system to be in a thorough state of disrepair. Alas! those tall elms were at this moment scarcely to

be called his own ; if he had wanted to cut down one of them, he would have had to have given the necessary orders before many hours should have flitted by. He could scarcely realise that, at last, it had actually come to this, and in the temporary and partial prostration of his faculties beneath which he began to suffer, he was unable to take to his heart, as a cordial balm, the idea that he was making restitution. Restitution that was tardy enough, and had been wrung from him by the dire pressure of a worse penalty, but restitution still—all it was in his power to make ; sufficient, surely, for him who, taught to look for no such fortune, would now assume the position which was his right—sufficient to earn forgiveness from him whom he had so unnaturally wronged, but who, he knew, only waited God's permission to accord that forgiveness, free and full. Following out this train of musing, Sir Ralph felt that he could even get up a sort of paternal tenderness for the offspring of that generous brother. He tried to picture him to himself—a striking figure, full of his father's energy, which would sparkle in his eye, no doubt, softened by something of the mild temperament of his Greek mother. Charles had once, he remembered, alluded to her gentle, timid disposition—he might not be difficult to manage—that is, to be made to see the matter in a proper light. The property was in a highly improved state—ah!—yes, he had done his duty there. And now his thoughts took another direction still, and this for the first time. It came so suddenly upon him that he started

from his chair and began to pace up and down the apartment, oblivious of his companion, who peered at him with some curiosity over the rim of his newspaper.

"Ha! he had never thought of that—cousins—first cousins—the thing had often been done—some people disliked the idea—that was nonsense—they were much about an age—Geraldine was well calculated to strike the imagination of a young man brought up in so retired a way—there would be every opportunity—he had been an ass to send them off that way to Wilmot's-Tower. But the young man was absent, and the Wilmots seemed inclined to look at it in a reasonable light—the course was clear yet—he would talk to Geraldine, if—humph!" He was roused from a continuation of this sort of musing by a dry remark from Mr Wright, watch in hand, that the time was drawing near when the party expected might be looked for.

"And now I'll just get out of the way till after you've got over the first introduction," said the lawyer, rising from his chair. "It will be better so; but I'll be close at hand—if I'm wanted."

Sir Ralph attempted to say something, but the words stuck in his throat. He nodded acquiescence, however, and the man of business withdrew. The baronet, left alone, tried very hard to nerve himself. It was no easy task. He glanced at a liqueur case which stood on the sideboard and hesitated, but, with a visible effort, and a murmured "Better not," turned on his heel, and left the breakfast-room for his own apartment, where he shut himself up, and beguiled the time by walking up and down

the room, with an occasional breathless pause listening for the sound of wheels. No matter how nervously and feverishly we may anathematise the lagging footsteps of Time, the appointed hour must come at last, be it desired or not. In this case, it is doubtful whether it was more desired or dreaded. When a condemned culprit awaits the execution of the last penalty, we presume the feeling will occasionally intrude itself that "'twere well 'twere done quickly." All beyond is to a certain extent unknown; but there is something necessarily repulsive to human nature in the idea of a bootless struggle for breath, and it is painfully easy to realise the sensation, while the actual moment is still distant.

Sir Ralph Maudesley's heart for a moment stopped beating, only to renew its action with increased vehemence, when the veritable sound of wheels separated itself distinctly from the rushing of the breeze through the foliage of the oaks. They approached—he heard them draw up at the hall entrance—the faint sound of the bell, usually scarcely discernible in this room, came clearly upon his ear—footsteps—the poor baronet was struggling wildly to assume the air of mournful and benevolent dignity which would be appropriate to the occasion, when a tap came to the door—it was opened, after a pause, gently, (Sir Ralph tried in vain to articulate "Come in,") and Colonel Thomas Clinton stood on the threshold. There was a hurried step or two on either side, and the gentlemen clasped hands, Sir Ralph's lips moving without sound and his eyes wandering nervously over Clinton's shoulder.

"Is he—is he"—gasped he, shaking like an aspen leaf, and half-supporting himself upon Tom's shoulder.

"By and by—by and by," said the latter, somewhat confused by the other's agitation, and using the tone in which one soothes a child over a cup of medicine. "My poor fellow, I fear you are scarcely able to stand this."

"Quite—quite able; let me sit down for a moment. I have not been—not been very well," said Sir Ralph, with a miserable attempt at a smile; "but let us get over, as far as we can, what is to be done."

"Sit down, then—there is no hurry—and nothing you need dread; on the contrary, if this is not the happiest day of your life, you're worse than I take you for, Maudesley, upon my honour."

Even at that moment Sir Ralph suffered the thought to pass through his mind that Clinton could scarcely measure *his* feelings by his own standard of morality. But he began to revive, and to recover his faculties.

"Is he here?" asked he, in a comparatively firm tone of voice.

"Here? Yes; they're all here—at least they will be presently. Thornfield's *non inventus* as yet, but we expect him every minute," said Tom, seeking to pave the way to the great disclosure he had to make, but not knowing exactly how to do it.

"Thornfield—is he of the party?"

"To be sure—he and the other are inseparables."

"It is as Wright hinted, then."

"No doubt. Why, the colour's coming to your cheek

again, such as it is; you're not one of the ruddy order; but you will pick up that too, by and by, or I'm mistaken. Why, Ralph, you will feel inclined to set every bell in the district a-ringing before this day is over!"

Sir Ralph Maudesley's features again writhed themselves into a mockery of a smile.

"I—I have done what I could, Thomas Clinton; he will not be a hard creditor, think you?"

"Trust him—trust me who tell you, you have nothing to fear." Clinton had been prepared with a magnificent specimen of diplomatic "way-paving;" in spite of himself he had got nervous, and had lost the thread of it for ever.

"Can you—hem!—can you see him? Don't be flurried."

"One moment!" gasped the baronet, with outstretched hand, the impersonation of feebleness. "Is he like his father? I mean in disposition?"

"A great improvement upon it, as far as I know; but something like it, no doubt."

"I do not quite understand you, Tom Clinton. Charles was generosity itself—woe's me!" and tears quivered in the wretched baronet's eyes and trickled down his pale cheek. A sound very like a deep sigh was heard through the folding-doors which communicated with the room beyond.

"What was that? Did you hear that sigh, Tom Clinton? Is it my nephew who overhears us? Let us go to him—dear lad! I feel certain"—

"A moment, Ralph—a moment," said Clinton, putting

forth one detaining hand, and talking thick and fast. "My dear fellow, it is time to let you know there is some mistake here—what if there was no *boy* in the case?"

"No boy! do you mean to tell me that my brother's child is a girl?"

- "Not exactly—in fact—pshaw! Ralph, collect yourself; muster all your nerve for a moment, and listen to me."

The baronet sank back upon his seat, and looked silently at Tom's agitated countenance.

"You remember the time when, as you have related to me, you stood beside the bier whereon lay what—what"——

"Whereon lay my brother's corpse. Can I ever forget it?"

"Whereon lay what *appeared to be* your brother's corpse." Tom felt his wrist grasped with a force which bespoke a sudden spasm; it was immediately relaxed, and a hoarse inarticulate sound came from the lips of his companion. Clinton, however, felt that he was in for it, and must go on. With a nervous glance over his shoulder, he proceeded; there was a faint rustling noise on the other side of the folding-doors.

"Maudesley—Maudesley—reflect; your glance was but a cursory one; you were under the influence of emotion which might well be blinding. Are you sure of what you saw?"

Sir Ralph Maudesley rose slowly from his chair, his breast heaving convulsively, his face the colour of ashes,



and his eyes staring wildly at some point beyond and over Clinton's head. The latter started to his feet, took one look behind him, and saw that his mission was at an end. On the threshold of the entrance to the inner chamber stood Gilbert Marston.

"Ralph! Ralph! my childhood's companion—my brother—my brother still!"

Motionless as a statue, Ralph Maudesley, with a hoarse rattling in his throat, and his lips working silently and fast, extended his hands as though to ward off a dreaded apparition. The other slowly advanced into the apartment.

"Ralph—my father's son—will you not exchange forgiveness with me?"

With one short, hoarse shriek, an effort of overtaxed nature, Ralph Maudesley fell into the arms of Clinton, who stood ready to receive him as he sunk, helpless, senseless down.

"You were too abrupt, *Sir Charles*," said the latter, as they placed Ralph between them on the sofa which stood near; "of course this was to be looked for."

"My God—he is like death—we should have had medical aid at hand—I did not know he was so weak."

"Hand me that phial—ha, I thought so—he always had this sort of stuff about him—sal volatile; can you see a glass anywhere—and water? Better not have the servants yet, if we can help it."

"Hush!—he is beginning to come round. Now, Colonel Clinton, I know I can trust to your tact and skill. I will

retire into the background till you give me permission to appear. Poor Ralph! I have exacted a heavy retribution from him, after all."

As Sir Charles Maudesley (for it is needless now to deny him his proper name and title) retired once more into the adjoining room, his brother indeed began to give indication of a return to consciousness. A slight flickering appeared about his eyelids, his lips moved, and he sighed deeply once or twice. Then his eyes opened and fixed themselves languidly on Clinton's face.

"Good heavens! Clinton," whispered he, hoarsely, "have I been dreaming?—was it the laudanum?—I thought"—

"Take another drop of this—if there is no wine at hand. Never mind, we won't ring. No, old fellow, it was no dream. Be a man; you ought to be a happy one. Your brother is indeed restored to you from the grave!"

"My brain is all confusion!—what has happened?—I cannot understand anything;" and tears again flowed rapidly down Ralph's cheeks. He held Clinton firmly by the wrist, as though fearful of being left to himself.

"My brother—Charles—I saw him—dead!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear fellow—calm yourself—all a mistake."

"A mistake—O my God!—bear with me—forgive me—help me to preserve my senses!"

"Yes; pray, Ralph Maudesley, pray,—you are in the right path now; keep it, and you will get to the journey's end safe and sound."

"Heaven help me—Heaven help me! I am a poor weak wretch. Charles—my brother—here?"

"Ay, here—anxious to exchange forgiveness with you. Can you see him? I think you can. Come, man yourself."

"My brother—here!" still dreamily repeated Ralph Maudesley. "How can it be?"

"He will tell you himself. Look—he is only waiting permission to take you to his heart once more, and for ever. Suffer him," said Tom Clinton, getting eloquent, as he rose to leave the brothers alone, Sir Charles now re-appearing at the doorway. "Hear what he has to tell—and then repent in earnest, and thank God that you have saved your soul alive!"

And the speaker vanished from the apartment, leaving the brothers alone together.

Much rejoiced was honest Thomas that his share of the drama was played. He quite hugged himself in this reflection, rubbing his hands together and walking up and down that inner apartment, which was the usual reception-room for visitors. Tom considered, and not altogether unjustly, that he had managed the matter well, considering that, having forgotten his part as laid down at the outset, his acting was all impromptu. And he now addressed himself to keeping watch that no untimely interruption should break short the brothers' *tête-à-tête*.

"And so a title and a fortune shift shoulders," thought he, musing. "My faith! one is fain to believe in charity that it must be a relief to the last bearer—but—hum!"

Tom might have continued in this strain of meditation for about a quarter of an hour or more, when a glance at the approach, which was visible from the windows of that apartment, made him stop short with an exclamation, and then stride towards the folding-doors, and tap hurriedly at them.

But let us give ear for a moment to what was being said on the other side of the said doorway.

The brothers were locked for some moments in a close embrace—of forgiveness on the one side, of appeal for pardon, deprecation, acknowledgment of weakness on the other. By and by, the one was able to question, the other ready to answer. It was a curious sight to see, that pair—how strangely, inexplicably alike in feature, and yet how different; who would have pronounced the stalwart man who held in his strong arms that pallid, wasted form, to be the elder of the twain!

Ralph (Sir Ralph no longer) almost at once adverted to that primary point of bewilderment, the boy—he had been accustomed so long to look upon that shadowy existence as a fact, that he could not, without a stronger effort than he was at present capable of making, wrench the idea from his mind.

“But the boy—Charles—your son—has Thornfield deceived me in this?”

A shade of sadness came over Sir Charles Maudesley's brow.

“Thornfield scarcely deceived you, Ralph, though, for a purpose arranged between us, he suffered you to deceive

yourself. I had a child, a son, as you have heard—he did not survive his mother beyond a few weeks—his innocent spirit went to join hers within that short period; may God have taken them to Himself, and grant us submission to His will! At the time from which I commence the slight narrative which will be necessary to explain these matters—that is, when I halted at the little village of—— near Gallipoli,—my little one and his mother lay sleeping side by side in the little burying-ground attached to the place. As you are aware, it was at her brother's cottage I resided for those few days,—and now you know the cause of my lingering there.

“Ralph—dear old fellow,” continued the noble-hearted baronet, when he had dashed a tear from his eyelid with his hand, “in talking of what happened then, I must wound you—and pain myself; but have we not exchanged forgiveness—and is it certain which of us has most to be forgiven? Bear with me, then, while I hurriedly run over the events of that dreadful day.

“In travelling, I had with me an attendant—half-friend, half-retainer; I could not call him servant—a Hungarian, who had served with me as sergeant in a regiment of horse, and had become attached to me from certain causes which are unimportant here. His name was Stanislas Czernaski—his age about my own, or something less, and his features rather remarkably similar to mine. This likeness had been, in fact, the means of my once rendering him a service, which he looked upon as constituting a life-long debt—poor Stanislas! he little thought how soon that debt was to be dis-

charged, and with what interest, though I have every reason to believe he would not have grudged even that.

"We had been out as usual on the morning I speak of, and were returning towards the village, thoughtless of impending danger, when on a sudden we found ourselves beset by robbers. As nearly as I could guess, some six or eight men composed the band, who started on either side from among the rocks and bushes of the narrow gorge we were carelessly threading. Stanislas was probably thinking of his home—I was dreaming of those who might have formed one for me at some future period, had God so willed. Be that as it may, our reflections were rudely interrupted. We had no time to realise the amount of our danger—the robbers were bold and well-armed, and we had to fight for our lives. Poor Czernaski fell, covered with wounds—that which brought him to the ground was a scimitar cut, which nearly divided his head from forehead to chin. I do not remember ever having so nearly despaired of my life. Five or six of our assailants were still able to wield their weapons, and apparently with undiminished vigour. I was wounded, though slightly, in two or three places—when the arrival of aid most unexpectedly changed the aspect of affairs. A man in the dress of a Turkish police-officer, who, mounted upon a rather jaded horse, had contrived to get close to us unperceived, charged the brigands in rear with such fury that the few who withstood or escaped the shock, after a pause of dismay, dashed at the hill-side, and scrambled off among the crags and underwood. I scarcely need name my rescuer—it was Basil Thornfield. From

that hour commenced a comradeship which has lasted till this day—you will learn to esteem him, Ralph—a comradeship which I have hoped, and sometimes believed, might last to the grave.

“Ralph—I could not explain these things thoroughly were I to spare you, as I wish it were in my power to do—it is all over—that devil’s mist has cleared away from between us—but, I was grieved to the heart by what Thornfield now told me. In my wrath and despair, I at first thought of meeting you face to face, upbraiding and leaving you, then and for ever, to the enjoyment, as a gift, of that wealth which had tempted you out of your better nature. Become a little calmer, I formed the resolution of consulting with my new friend, through whose rough exterior I already fancied I could detect the working of a generous, honest spirit. Living as I did in those days, I allowed myself little time for prolonged study of individual character; my friendships were generally formed on the spur of the moment—like other slaves of impulse, I have been mistaken in my time—however, we consulted together, and soon concocted a plan, the first part of it being this. The body of poor Stanislas was arranged, so that, by the dim light of my brother-in-law’s cottage, and in the hurried survey which, we felt assured, would be all that the contents of the bier would receive—Thornfield appeared satisfied of that, from what he had observed, he said—it might be mistaken for my own. You were to have been apprised of what had taken place—coloured, of course, to suit our scheme—when your sudden advent not only saved us that labour, but nearly

disconcerted our arrangements. A lucky fainting fit detained you at the entrance of the cottage for a few minutes, which sufficed for my escape to an adjoining hovel.

"You remember what then occurred. That your heart bled for the brother who, you fancied, lay dead before you, dear Ralph, I believe from the bottom of my own. You asked for, or Basil gave you the ring which we had placed upon the dead man's finger. Basil did not think you much moved at the time; remember, he did not know you as I did. I refused then and ever afterwards to listen to him on that point.

"According to our first arrangement, the deception was but to have lasted for a few days; long enough to search your heart to the core; but, somehow, my true reason being obscured by what had taken place, the experiment did not satisfy me in its results. A deep gulf yawned between us; I yearned, not to bridge it across, but to fill it up and smooth it over, and have all restored to the shape it wore in our happy young days—in those days when honour was our pole-star, and earth's riches the dirt on which we trod. Therefore, I determined to win you back—to receive again, no matter at what distance of years, the brother whom I gave up for a time for trial and refinement in the fire of his awakened conscience. This yearning became a deep-rooted feeling—a determination upon which, in spite of Thornfield's oft-repeated remonstrances, I have perseveringly acted. You were to be subjected to a test—the pretence of my child's existence furnished us with one. The moment that, of your own free will, you sought to do



justice, however tardy, to the father through the son, your ordeal and mine were to be at an end. Thus went on a length of years. I have not been unhappy, nor even self-denying. You know how, through the agency of Wright and Thornfield, I have contrived all along to share the Maudesley rental—amply so for all my wants. For the rest, old fellow," said Sir Charles, rising from the sofa whereon they had been sitting, and with his kind hand still on his brother's shoulder, "for the rest, it is yours still as far as you like to use it. I have 'neither chick nor child'—never shall have; enjoy these earthly benefits with me while we live, and when we go to our long sleep, your daughter, the lady of the hall, will hang our tombstones with flowers!"

Ralph Maudesley was so struck to the heart by his brother's generous words, that he actually kept out of sight their kind significance, as bearing upon his fortunes. He was endeavouring to falter forth some expressions of gratitude for the forgiveness, which he could not but feel to have been lightly earned, when they were interrupted by a tap at the inner door, and the sound of Clinton's voice anxiously inquiring whether he might break upon their conference.

"Certainly, colonel—come in, by all means," replied Sir Charles Maudesley, and Tom entered the apartment, speaking as he came.

"There is a vehicle coming up the approach—must be fast nearing the door of the hall," said he, avoiding with his eye the spot where Ralph Maudesley sat, half-reclined.

"I fear it is no other than our friend St Alban."

"What! our *bête noire*?" said Sir Charles, gaily; "upon my honour, Ralph, I should like to see him. But you could not stand it, I fear," continued he, looking at his brother's pale countenance, which was indeed ghastly enough.

"We can easily send him about his business," quoth Clinton.

"No, no; if I may decide, let him be brought in, and the matter ended," said Ralph Maudesley. "Exhausted or not, I shall not be made worse by the few words which will suffice here; and I would not have it on my mind a moment longer than is necessary. Let him come, Tom Clinton, if you will." The last three words were addressed more to Sir Charles, who nodded, and laughed.

"I will undertake him for you, Ralph," said he. "This sort of thing is nothing new in my experience."

"Here he comes, then," muttered Clinton, "so we must make the best of it."

The door leading from the hall here opened, and Mr Merton, glad of an excuse to see what was going on in his master's study, ushered in Mr Geoffrey St Alban. Sir Charles Maudesley had assumed a position where he was somewhat screened from observation by an interposing piece of furniture, but he looked therefrom with much curiosity at the somewhat clouded features of the new-comer. The latter glanced around, and bowed to Colonel Clinton, at the same time that he extended his hand to Ralph Maudesley, who still retained his place on the sofa. Tom returned St Alban's salutation with haughty curtness.

"I—God bless me!—I am sorry to see you looking so—poorly," stammered the latter, still holding Sir Ralph's passive hand in his own. "Merton proclaimed you to be much better since I saw you last. What do *you* say?"

"I am tolerably well, thank you," replied Ralph, very coldly, and withdrawing his hand as he spoke. "There is nothing the matter; on the contrary, much has been removed that obstructed my return to health."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad. I was about to say that I would take another opportunity to converse about our little matter of business. I did not expect to find you engaged,—coming myself by engagement, you see."

"When an engagement is one-sided, Mr St Alban, the proposer must lay his account to an occasional interruption."

The *quondam* baronet's tone was so cold, that Mr St Alban, who was prepared for a somewhat different reception, was evidently discomfited. His reception, he had anticipated, might be cool, but he was not prepared for a certain firmness of tone, which was evident enough, feeble as the accents were.

"Then, perhaps," said he, "you will favour me with half-a-dozen words in another room. Half-a-dozen will do—one, if you like," added he, with much significance.

"Anything you have to say may be said here, and in the presence of these gentlemen," replied Sir Ralph, whose strength of frame and nerve was really serving him wonderfully.

"Do you quite understand me, Sir Ralph Maudesley? I wrote you a note"—

"Which I got."

"And you persist in refusing me a private interview," said Mr Geoffrey St Alban, getting irritated enough to be rather oblivious of the proper demeanour towards a gentleman in his own house—a thing he had studied carefully of late years.

Thomas Clinton could not help here interposing a word.

"Maudesley is not in a state to discuss business matters, Mr St Alban. Will your tact not serve to make that plain without your being told so in so many words?"

Mr St Alban glanced angrily at Tom's heated visage.

"I wish to address myself to the master of the house, sir, alone, it being with him alone that my business lies."

"Really?" said a deep voice on the other side of the room, the owner thereof quietly emerging from behind a book-case. "I am not aware of any matter of business which can possibly exist between myself and a gentleman with whom I have not the honour to be acquainted; but I shall be glad to be enlightened. Say away, sir, by all means; or if a private room be really indispensable"—

"Allow me to introduce you," cried the delighted Tom Clinton, while Mr St Alban gazed in utter bewilderment at the stranger—"Sir Charles Maudesley."

"The master of this house and all appertaining to it," Ralph contrived to enunciate. "Speak to *him*—if your

business bears reference to the property which is his, or the affairs of the family of which he is the head."

"Bravo, Ralph Maudesley!" murmured Clinton, in a tone of pleased surprise, while Sir Charles bowed in grave acquiescence.

If confusion ever was depicted in the features of human being, it was so now in those of Mr Geoffry St Alban of Monkshood Vale. Grasping a chair which stood near him by the back, he fixed a wild, breathless stare on Sir Charles Maudesley's face.

"What riddles are these?" gasped he, hoarsely.

"There is but one, and it is easily read," quoth Clinton; "the dead alive—the lost found—the old trick of the sovereign shifted from your pocket to mine by one word of the magician. *Presto!* pass. You have lost your coin, sir, believe me, though *I* may not have found it."

"I shall seek some other opportunity of unravelling this—mystery," said St Alban, backing towards the door, but still unable to take his eyes off Sir Charles Maudesley's countenance, or to realise more than a general idea that he was bamboozled, somehow, and laughed at. "But beware, Sir Ralph—Ralph Maudesley, if"——

The door opened behind him as he extended his hand towards it, and on the threshold stood Basil Thornfield.

"Just in time," said the man-at-arms, nodding towards his friends, and looking his very sternest, though with a certain amount of triumph in his visage, as he looked St Alban in the face. "Save you, comrade, and not so fast; I have a word for your ear."

Geoffry St Alban felt himself by this time in a decided minority. The precise cause he did not dare then stop to investigate. A mass of confused ideas were floating in his brain; but he was thoroughly exasperated, and a caged tiger would have been a safer playmate for most men.

"Out of my way, man," snarled he, advancing upon Thornfield, who retained his position in the doorway, with his arms coolly folded over his broad chest,—“out of my way; I know nothing of you.”

“Nothing?” sternly replied Thornfield; “nothing? *Rappelle-toi, mon brave—moi, je suis le* LIEUTENANT JULES GASPARD. *Ha! ha! tu me reconnais maintenant, n'est ce pas?—SOIXANTE-QUATORZE!*”

There was a pause of silence so deep that a pin could have been heard to drop on the floor. St Alban stood as if petrified, with a wild stare fixed on the countenance of him who spoke—his face like that of a corpse, and his breath coming thick and short. Ralph Maudesley was lying back thoroughly exhausted by the excitement he had undergone; his brother and Tom Clinton looked curiously on at the scene which was being enacted, but the latter became aware that there were others besides the servants, who began to hover curiously about, in rear of the man-at-arms. The shock, whatever its nature, which Thornfield's words had carried with them to the person addressed, had evidently been a terrible one—the generality of mankind would have sunk before it—but St Alban was not like the generality of mankind. His nerves were

iron, and having vibrated fiercely for a moment, recovered their equilibrium.

"Let me pass, I tell you, whoever you are. Do you fancy me a fitting butt for this ribald trash?" hissed he, from between his clenched teeth. "You are mistaken—all of you; as for you, Ralph Maudesley, the world shall soon judge"——

What makes him stop short with a sort of shriek, and, staggering wildly back, clutch at the different articles of furniture near, and finally sink powerless on the first chair that meets him in his course? His hands, which had been clenched and rigid, are now grasping and tearing at his hair, his eyeballs protruding from beneath his forehead, and light specks of foam quivering about his lips. Can it be the entrance of that very quiet-looking personage, who insinuates himself so gently between the door-post and Basil Thornfield's burly frame? Clinton recognised the new comer—it was the mysterious individual who got out of the *coupé* at King's Cross, on the former's last trip from Haverton to London, *en route* for Southampton, and Tom had somehow or other a vague impression of having seen him both before and after that occasion. The stranger bowed pleasantly and rubbed his hands, as he looked round the company. He laughed slightly, and favoured Tom with a special nod as his glance met his, then he transferred his attention, but still with an air of perfect good breeding, (*savoir faire*, he would have called it,) to the petrified figure in the chair before him.

"Quite a reunion," said he, in a mildly facetious tone ;

"a pleasure I have long anticipated—so long, *Monsieur D'Estanges*," and his voice changed to one of gentle remonstrance, as he gazed on the features of him so addressed, whom *we* know as Geoffrey St Alban. The latter was ungrateful enough to receive this courteous intimation with a deep groan. Basil Thornfield leant against the door-post with his arms still folded—the other gentlemen were silent; Sir Charles looking anxiously at his brother's countenance, which was getting more deathlike every moment; and Mr Wright, who now appeared in the outer hall, was busying himself in checking the curiosity of the domestics.

"*Il faut finir cela*," said Thornfield, looking towards the two Maudesleys. "*Tu dois y mettre la termination, Brelacq, mon ami.*"

"*C'est ça—vous avez raison, Jules*," responded the officer, who was helping himself to a pinch of snuff, and, while blandly smiling, was keeping an attentive watch upon his victim; "*c'est ça*," and he dived each hand into a pocket of his light overcoat.

"Ah, *coquin!*" shouted he, suddenly rushing forward and seizing St Alban's uplifted wrist—"is that your game?—you play me that trick?—bah! for shame, when everything can be regularly arranged, and the result the same, only better managed. See, *messieurs*," continued he, holding up to view a small ivory-handled stiletto, of which he had possessed himself after a very brief struggle; "*n'est ce pas que c'est lâche—ingrat!—fidonc, Monsieur*



D'Estanges ;” and he occupied himself for one moment about the wrists of the latter, leaving him then incapable of further attempts against himself or others.

“Now all is *comme il faut*,” said Monsieur Brelacq of the *bureau de police*, gently *dabbing* his brow with a silk pocket-handkerchief.

“Of what am I accused ?” demanded the wretched man before him, in a hoarse voice, so unlike his usual tones, that it would not have been recognised as his. “I am an English subject—you, gentlemen—Maudesley, I have eaten your salt—will you suffer me to be dragged away like this ?”

“Ah !” said Monsieur Brelacq, in answer to the glances of inquiry which he met all round, “*messieurs* will do me the justice to suppose I have not been unmindful of all legal requirements. My own warrant is here—I feel quite ashamed to mention its date—I am but human. But that all might be perfectly regular and exact, two gentlemen from the *bureau* in Bow Street were kind enough to give me their countenance—they are downstairs—*sapristie !* the securing their services nearly made us late—*voilà, messieurs, regardez* with what anxiety I devote myself to observe the strict regularity. They also hold a warrant—Monsieur D'Estanges will have to answer the matter therein contained—a mere *bagatelle*—before settling matters with the *bureau de justice* in France.”

St Alban shuddered convulsively. He was now sitting, a wretched figure of despair, his hair matted and damp, and his chin supported upon his breast.

mode of dealing, *nous a*

"Can you wind up  
Thornfield will explain  
Sir Charles Maudesley,  
support any further exc

"*Mais oui*," said the  
wards the miserable S  
regain his composure.  
he had staked life upon

"*En route*, Monsieur  
the police-officer—" *all*  
ah! you are a brave  
*manqué le coup—quoi* c  
of it, *mon ami*, and ma  
you have played the gi  
*nous voilà en route—n*  
parting grasp between t  
St Alban in passing gl  
prey vanished through  
for ever.

bubble to some purpose? 'Double, double, toil and trouble,' ay, double and treble and quadruple trouble would have been upon this house, perhaps, if the blow-up had not happened in time. Will you hear an account of how it came about?"

"First," said Sir Charles Maudesley, "let us get poor Ralph to his room, and—I really think we had better send off a telegraphic despatch for his medical man—who is it?"

"Gregory Dawbody," said Mr Wright, who was now one of the company; "I'll manage that for you," and he left the apartment, returning in a minute or two.

"How do you feel, Ralph? Are you better, now this confounded business is over? We have sent for your doctor in case you should be the better of some soothing appliance or other—but I think you had better get to bed in the meantime."

"To my room—not bed—thank you," murmured Ralph, who was evidently quite unfit for further conversation at present. The servants were rung for, and their master assisted to his own apartment, where we leave him for a space to recover himself.

"And now, Basil," said Sir Charles, returning to the room where they were assembled, "suppose you give us a sketch of your proceedings, and enlighten us as to what all this means?"

"Of course," said the man-at-arms; "you got my note, I presume,—that I left at the bar of the 'Royal Arms?' Well, as his ill luck would have it, though it but hurried

the catastrophe after all, that gentleman who has just left us under escort came into the travellers' room, where I was sitting, just after you left. I don't know how it was—partly, probably, because I had been thinking of him from something Brelacq told me at King's Cross—you remember? The South-Sea missionary—ho! ho!—however, I knew him before I had looked twice at his ill-looking face—not that it's in every sense so ill-looking either, but that's nothing to the purpose. Well, I wrote that note, and bolted off to the station, where I got a train to London, by good fortune, with scarcely any delay to speak of. I soon found Brelacq, having his instructions where to look for him, in case anything should come in my way to make it advisable. He was as pleased as I was—more so—for he had a double interest in laying hold of our friend yonder, and in any case, as far as that goes, would have had him by the collar in a few days' time. 'The pitcher goes often to the well, but it is broken at last.' We went to Bow Street, and arranged with the people there to send a couple of fellows with us, and all to start next morning—we could not earlier—no train. I forgot to mention that when I first recognised our friend, I made assurance doubly sure by a *ruse*, which discovered a peculiar mark borne by him—the loss of the right ear—so that there could not possibly be a mistake on the subject. You will ask what was my own private feeling against this scamp which made me so inveterate in the pursuit of him? It is easily told—and the easiest way is to sketch his career. Imprisoned for life—man's blood upon his hand, and shed by

stealth—by a desperate and cunning device he managed to escape from the galleys, a double murderer. He assassinated one of the keepers as he went, aided by another miscreant who was involved in his original crime, and was worse, if possible, than himself. This man had been croupier, or bonnet, or something, at a notorious gambling house, which was shut up by the police, immediately after the little episode which brought Messieurs D'Estanges and Boulnois to the *Bagne*. D'Estanges contrived the escape very cleverly—he was a superior sort of fiend, and had managed to secrete a shred of paper upon which with a coal he had traced a tolerable ground-plan, for his comrade's guidance, of the prison where they lay. So off they went, leaving their mark in blood, and for long years justice looked after them in vain. For me—being in the military service of France at the time, I happened to be in garrison at Toulon, and was in command of the detachment placed in guard upon the felons, at the time of the above escape. The result was loss of my grade, and dismissal from the service in disgrace—a service in which my blood had been shed like water; no matter; I had no friends; but I treasured the circumstance in my heart of hearts, and there more or less it fretted its casket up to the last hour. Brelacq had been on the look-out for D'Estanges for some time—ever since the robbery and shooting exploit in this house—of course he recognised Boulnois, for he came down, more in curiosity than from any other motive, to watch the proceedings of the inquest—and his suspicions were strongly excited by a scrap of paper which was found on the deceased,

and which forcibly reminded him of that left behind by D'Estanges and his companion in the corridor of the prison at Toulon. 'Whom God wills should meet destruction, He first robs of his reason,' says the proverb. There was a sort of private mark of D'Estanges', which he had been double ass enough to affix to both documents—it must have been in a moment of aberration. You know what follows. I need not go on. The lease of life he held under a certain landlord was out, and *he* saw no reason to renew it. He could do no further mischief in this world, so *he* calls him home to himself. *Voilà tout!*"

Sir Charles Maudesley and Clinton, during this narrative, exchanged looks of profound and still-increasing amazement. Mr Wright, whom nothing surprised, nodded from time to time, as if to say it was just what he would have expected, and took a good deal of snuff, meditatively.

"And now," said the latter gentleman, brushing sundry aromatic particles from his shirt-front, "somebody will have to communicate with Lady—hem—Mrs Ralph Maudesley, and the lassie Geraldine—poor things!"

"Ah!" said Sir Charles, "I am ashamed to think I was forgetting *them*,—no fear of the shock being hurtful to poor Lucy, I trust?"

"Just the thing that was wanted to restore her to health, I should say," replied the lawyer; "but it may as well be gently broken to her for all that."

"I think I could manage it," said Clinton, "they are at Wilmot's-Tower on a visit, did not we hear? There is the packet we took charge of for his father from the lad

Wilmot, you know—an excellent excuse—if indeed one were wanted on such an occasion.”

Accordingly, it was settled that Tom should start for —shire next morning, and break the news of their change of prospects to the ladies there after his own fashion. Mr Wright was of opinion that there was nothing after all in the nature of the intelligence which would necessitate much diplomacy, and Ralph Maudesley, upon being referred to in the course of the evening, expressed himself more than willing to place the matter in Tom's hands.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### DROP THE CURTAIN.

ON the morning following that of his departure from Maudesley Hall, Thomas Clinton arrived at Wilmot's Tower, and, having presented his credentials, was received with an exuberance of hospitality which made him almost ashamed that in coming there he had an ulterior object. The packet of letters from Frank was, as usual, a source of much rejoicing, that young man's correspondence having of late been of a fitful order; but the visitor was at the same time given to understand that his own claims to hospitality would have been amply sufficient without any supplementary ones, and much unaffected indignation was expressed on the part of old Wilmot that he should have thought fit, modestly, to leave his travelling-bag in the first instance at the hotel in the little village watering-place some miles off. Of course his actual object in coming could not long lie concealed, for he had no time to throw away, and was not one of those people who could go about their daily avocations with something on their minds; but though, possibly, this may have softened down to some small extent the urgency of old Wilmot's



hospitable overtures, it was only that he, Thomas Clinton, might feel himself perfectly unfettered in following out the matter he had at heart.

We have lately supped full of such emotions as bewilderment, confusion, dismay, therefore we pass lightly over the effect upon the two ladies, *quondam* of Maudesley Hall, worked by their friend Clinton's revelation. As for the last-named sensation, it really had no place in the bosom of either lady, as soon as it became clear to them that nothing worse had happened than a diminution of worldly riches and position. Alas! what happiness had the possession of either brought to them? It was not necessary for Clinton to enter into every circumstance connected with the *eclaircissement*. Those which must have been painful to listen to were now stored in the hearts of none but sincere well-wishers,—honourable men,—thanks to Monsieur Brelacq of the *bureau de police*, Paris. And, oh! how Geraldine rejoiced, when she and her mother talked it over together, and thanked Heaven for the passing away of a cloud which had darkened every hour of their existence. Ralph Maudesley's connexion with St Alban remained a mystery; but they were content with the fact that *he* was powerless for future persecution. They could not avoid shuddering, however, at the thought that such a personage should have had the privilege to take their hands in his, to talk familiarly to both, to approach one with—pah! how gladly they turned from the subject, and tried to stifle the thought of what might have been,—might have been, that is, "thought the younger lady," but for

the strength of mind supplied her from no earthly source ; for it never should have happened—never, though much misery might have resulted from the pressure put upon her inclinations. And by whom? Some day, perhaps, Ralph Maudesley will make such revelations to his wife and child as will suffice to win back the confiding affection which was nigh quivering to its socket in their guileless breasts ; for though it may burn very low in female hearts, (unfed by the oil of true respect,) it never goes quite out, and may be re-illumed at all times by a breath of natural feeling.

Tom Clinton found it impossible to place Sir Charles Maudesley's conduct in such a light as altogether to absolve him from blame with his sister-in-law.

"Do you think he could have been aware what misery he was causing us?" asked she.

Clinton, with perfect sincerity, gave it as his opinion that he was not. "He is the very soul of honour," said he, "and most kind and generous in his conduct and intentions towards you all, but—no doubt he is eccentric."

"I should fear his not being perfectly sane," said Mrs Maudesley.

"Oh, he is quite sane, Lucy—quite," replied Tom, a little embarrassed, for of course it was advisable to prepare the way for a cordial understanding.

"Still, I confess, I tremble rather at the idea of meeting him—if we must meet."

"Must meet? Why, God bless me, of course you

must; and you must be very cordial with him. Are you aware that, being childless, and unlikely to marry again, Geraldine here becomes "——

"Ah, my dear Tom, leave this dreadful money question alone for ever."

"The world will scarcely allow us to do that, my dear cousin. But we will put the matter aside for the present, and you will arrange when it will be convenient for you to accompany me back to Maudesley Hall."

"But are we really to go there?—we cannot remain, of course."

"Well, perhaps, you will take Ralph away somewhere by and by, just to let the busy tongues wag their fill, for the regulated nine days' time or so; but Sir Charles will expect you to be his guests for such time as may be necessary to form your plans; and Sir Ralph will really be the better for your society,—in fact, he cannot do without you,—so pray begin packing as soon as you can."

"Of course we shall begin this very hour," said the ladies together. "But there is something formidable in the idea of encountering that strange man, and being his guests in the house we have been accustomed to look upon as our own."

"You will find nothing formidable about him," said Clinton; "and you will find your position in the house a more pleasing one than it has been for long."

Lucy Maudesley, being a person of no great power of reticence, and being thoroughly persuaded of the sincere good will with which she and her daughter were regarded

by the Wilmots, fairly disclosed all she knew of the above matters to the lady of the house. She being pledged to no secrecy on the subject, but, on the contrary, rather encouraged to take her husband's opinion upon it, now discussed the affair with the good old gentleman. It was some time before either of them could recover from their astonishment sufficiently to examine the matter in all its bearings.

"Be very kind and cordial with these poor things—very kind and cordial, and do not let them leave us on any account," was all Mr Wilmot could say for some time; and he kept ringing the changes upon it, walking up and down the apartment where he and his helpmate conferred together.

"But I fear they are packing already to go," said Mrs Wilmot. "Of course I could not but offer every assistance, though, I am sure, I wish they would think of remaining quietly here, till all this settles down. But of course, Sir Ralph,—that is, dear me, Mr Maudesley,—has the first claim."

And I fear this must have been a terrible shock."

"O George, remember he has got back a brother."

"And lost a title and six or eight thousand a-year," quoth Mr Wilmot. "As regards his wife and Gerry, I should have no doubts, but Ralph—hum. By the by, Fanny, Frank may come home now, I imagine, eh?"

"You forget, George, that Geraldine will be her uncle's heiress?"

"That is as may be—but it is foreign to the purpose. I was thinking of that Monkshood Vale man, whose career

has met so terrible a termination. By the way, there is more in that business than you or I—hem—need trouble ourselves about, Mrs Wilmot. But, heiress! Zounds, do you mean to say that Frank Wilmot is not entitled to pay his addresses to any heiress in Great Britain? Wilmot's-Tower is not perhaps so large a property as Maudesley Hall, nor quite in such good order—humph—but the position Frank holds as my son and heir—the future representative of the Wilmots"—

"A position the dear boy will do honour to, George; but I feel certain he has no wish to anticipate the course of time."

"I know that; but the descendant of Raoul de Guillemot need not vail his crest to that of Ralph Maudesley—a family of yesterday—five or six centuries at most."

Here the entrance of the young ladies, Bell and Georgina, changed the subject of conversation, somewhat to Mrs Wilmot's relief, her better half not being easily stopped when once mounted on his family hobby.

Of course, it would have been no true act of kindness on the part of the Wilmots to press their guests to stay at this juncture. Therefore, with many unmistakable evidences of sincere interest revealed in the demeanour of the former, while wishing their friends "God-speed," the two ladies, under Clinton's escort, set off for what had been their home. On their arrival, they found Ralph, who had been attended by Sir Gregory Dawbody, and pronounced to be in want of nothing but repose, looking certainly not worse than they had left him. We pass over the interview

between the wife and husband—over the assurances which doubtless flowed from the latter, that the barrier which had so long frowned between them was thrown down, and the fragments cast aside for ever. Lucy Maudesley was a little agitated at the idea of the meeting with Sir Charles Maudesley, who still remained at the hall, though Thornfield had, at his own request, been permitted to return to town. All uneasiness was, however, soon dispelled by the more than genial kindness of the baronet's manner. His unaffected interest in her welfare—in that of Geraldine—in the speedy restoration to health of both invalids—the tact with which he preserved more the air of a guest, than that of a host—beseeching indeed, as a great favour, that things might be conducted on their former footing, at least for the present, and as long as might consist with his brother's convenience—all worked together to place the household on a mutually pleasant footing. There was, and ever had been, a charm in Sir Charles Maudesley's manner which disarmed reserve.

And Tom—poor Tom—honest Thomas Clinton, having been occupied in rushing about the world for the last six weeks or so, upon all people's affairs, as it were, except his own, returns to his prim lodgings in Sackville Street; to his lonely morning meal, his careful toilet, his musing stroll in the park, his simple, solitary dinner, at that thronged desert—the club. His part is played out for the present—they sought to detain him among them, but wanted him no longer—and he saw it, and fled to scenes where he is not wanted either, but is not in anybody's way.

exactly, and, at all events, has a right to be indifferent to the question, whether he is or no. Good-bye, old friend! God bless you! You are but a cipher in the great throng of society, but you are a true-hearted British gentleman for all that, and our own heart somewhat melts as we bid you "Farewell!"

Thomas will not be altogether permitted, however, to seclude himself from those who have a claim to call him "friend." All value him, each after their fashion. Sir Charles Maudesley, though ignorant how much he owes to his honest counsels, is grateful to him as the chief instrument in ripening a *denouement* for which he was beginning to weary; Ralph looks up to him, as a tried and trusty confidant—a man of a higher order than himself; Lucy Maudesley loves him, as she did long ago, with a sister's love; better had it been for her, could she have exchanged it then for a warmer feeling; ay, better perhaps to have linked her fortunes with his as it was.

"But, sir," here interposes Angelica, with the volume on her knee, (scene—a first-class railway carriage, or where you will,) "that could never have answered—what! without that sympathy, which—which"——

"My dear young lady, the sympathy which suggests 'pickles' to a lady whose husband is fond of 'cold beef,' is the sort which best stands wear and tear. They would have had that"——

"Pray do not be coarse, sir—coarseness is not wit. And then that sweet Geraldine—not to have had her"——

"Not to—why, bless my soul, ma'am, if she had mar-

ried Tom Clinton, do you suppose——? but *hallo! la*; we have arrived at the very extreme limit of 'legitimate discussion'; let us change the subject."

*Revenons à nos moutons.* Under the shade of the Maudesley oaks, the foliage of which is richer in colour, while getting sear and rather thin—brushing with their feet the dew-laden gossamer from the crisp pasturage, two others of our friends are walking in deep converse together. They have never quarrelled, those two, in the whole course of their comradeship—such could not be between spirits so attuned to each other—but yet their looks are grave and melancholy, and their voices sad and low.

"Be advised," Sir Charles Maudesley is saying, but with something akin to hopelessness in his tone, "old comrade; why will you be without a home—I having one to offer?"

"It would not do; the friends who knew you in your happier days are gathering fast about you."

"My happier days; what were they? And friends? I have but one whom I acknowledge as such, in the word's true acceptance—one tried in adversity—and he shrinks from me now when I most need his aid."

"His aid; in what way?"

"In reconciling me by his countenance to the sphere of life wherein my duty lies—think of that, Basil Thornfield—once more, be advised!"

There was a short pause; at the close of it the man-at-arms shook his head mournfully enough, but firmly.

"I have thought, and pondered, and dreamed, I may



say,"—proceeded he, in tones which had a sort of rough melody about them, in their sorrowful inflection—"of this question in every point of view from which it can be seen. *My* work is over here. *Your* happy lot is before you; let us not make the result of our labours imperfect by a presence which must keep alive the memory of that which made those labours needful. Hush!—old fellow—I know—God bless you! You would suffer that and more to give a calm home and resting-place to the comrade who has stuck by your fortunes through good and evil for so many years. But think one moment—with what feelings would others look upon one who has played so strange a part in the drama with which they were connected? Your brother—his wife—let *them* forget that such things have been between you and them—let not *me* be the skeleton in the niche of the banquet-hall! As to my courting death, as you said a while since—is it Gilbert Marston who talks in such a tone of death upon the battle-field to Basil Thornfield? Be Gilbert Marston still to me, my comrade, while we stand thus briefly face to face. For you, indeed, the tearful eye—the kind, gentle hand smoothing the pillow—may those soothe the passage of your spirit to heaven many a long year hence! But for *me*—a pioneer's pick-axe and mattock—a hammock and a shot—what matter? who is there to weep for the hired assassin?"

"Dear old boy, you shall not talk so."

"I won't, old fellow—d——n sentiment; but go I must. Charles—Gilbert—let me call you by the name I'm used

to—there is no such word as ‘rest’ in my vocabulary—I must go—and—and—if days, and months, ay, or years, pass away without your hearing of me, do not imagine for that, that you are forgot.”

“But if go you will, it need not be for long; and you will not be silent? The feeling that would prompt such a course on your part, Basil Thornfield, would be an utterly false one.”

“Well, we will talk further of that. To-morrow I go to London.”

“And thence? Well do I know you will not linger there.”

“True; I love not the mighty Babylon;” and something of the soldier’s reckless *insouciance* began once more to sparkle in Thornfield’s eye. “No, I have made my arrangements—I am bound for France.”

“For France! ah! I understand.”

“Quite so. In that service volunteers have some chance—here there is a red-tape barrier which shuts them from employment. Better so, perhaps, in the main; however, I have had some communication with my old commander, Dupré, and he will receive me on the above footing into the ranks of his corps.”

“Dupré of the African *chasseurs*?”

“The same. He sails with his regiment for Turkey in the course of the next fortnight—I shall meet them at Burgas.”

“I—I wish to Heaven I were going with you!”

“Nonsense! I will not speak of it more; the trumpet

is rousing you to madness, old war-steed ; for madness it would be, indeed, in one situated as you are to think of such a thing. Come home—come, the shadows are lengthening—we have to-night before us yet—you will drink a full glass to *my* onward fortunes, and I will drain one to *your* happiness here—and hereafter !”

His onward fortunes—ah ! poor Basil Thornfield—a rough path still, but near its termination. Let us follow him thereto—a few steps will do it ; already we seem to hear the roar of the breakers, beyond which lies the dark, still ocean of eternity, for which he is bound.

We adjust our magic mirror—the smoke-clouds roll asunder, and within their depths appear the serried ranks of two embattled armies. Hark to the shrill tones of the trumpet ! Six hundred of Britain’s noblest warriors—her armed horsemen—move forward with steady tramp, as though bearing annihilation to the foe on hoof and sabre edge. They know not whom they are to encounter, or very clearly *where*. No matter—they have heard the words, “Yonder are your guns—they are in the hands of the enemy—pursue them !” and the bright-blue eye of each Saxon trooper, the keen gray one of the Scot, the dark glance of the reckless Irishman—all are fixed with stern intensity on the form of their leader. The pace increases as they go ; the clang and the clash and the muffled tramp on the turf are merged in one wild clamour, for the foe is now close before them, and though his ranks number thousands for their hundreds—ay, for their tens—“Onward !” is the only cry—charge, for Britain’s glory, and

recovery of the roses reft from her chaplet.\* But see! the firm formation in which at first they moved is shaken—wavering—gone—the strife for glory is ended ere well begun, and the riven squadrons are battling for dear existence.

“How is this?” asks some old veteran of the Peninsula, horrified at the scene within our mirror—“a cross-fire of artillery on cavalry—monstrous!”

“Even so, *vieux moustache*—we are not inventive—our glass but serves as the reflex of things that are.”

Checking their fiery Arab steeds as they fiercely champ the bit, murmuring half-audible curses at the righteous caution which holds them back, our gallant allies have, up to this moment, surveyed the scene. But they can refrain no longer—it is not in the nature of French soldiers tamely to witness glory striven for by others, drenched as it may be in gore. Hark again to the trumpet! Forth to the rescue, with exulting shout, dash the brave *Chasseurs d'Afrique*. Who rides in the very front, of bulk superior to most of his comrades, a wild light in his gray eye, the sabre quivering at arm's length in the air, as he turns in his saddle to cheer on the willing troopers? Heedless of the iron storm which empties many a saddle, they are upon the hostile cannoniers, they sabre them, trample them down—annihilate them—but eager thousands are ready to confront *them* also—marshal the serried ranks—level the deadly lance—wheel round the guns—mow down

\* Not lost by her own sons—the gallant Osmanli can best tell how they were amissing.—*Author*.

the audacious handful, who now are fighting their desperate way back. A few will tell the story to wondering comrades in their tents that night—many will groan and writhe on the dreary hospital couches—more will lie calmly sleeping beneath the starlit sky of the battle-field where they fell. And lo! among these last, with shattered forehead turned upward to the silent firmament—the sword still attached by the useless strap to the half-severed wrist—there, on the red field of Balaklava lying, poor Basil Thornfield, the soldier of fortune, claims a soldier's grave!

"We have lost our volunteer," said, mournfully, the colonel of the *chasseurs*, at the close of that bloody day. "*Grand dommage!—c'était un sabreur magnifique!*"

Such was the dead man's epithalamium, and there for a while reposed his clay, but not for long. We can best explain our meaning by giving ear to a conversation which took place among some of the surviving *chasseurs* of the regiment, a few weeks after the above episode.

They are sitting round a small fire of charcoal at the entrance of a tent, smoking and conversing over the events of that memorable day.

"And it does my heart good, Antoine," says a grim-looking sergeant, addressing a comrade who had just arrived from hospital at the Dardanelles; "it does my heart good to know that he was not, after all, without a friend to shed tears over his grave—though it was little to him—still, one would not willingly see so brave a soldier huddled away with the rest, friend and foe, without a stone

seeing it, Antoine,  
—*très bel homme*,  
Florence, I think  
meets me on my  
me—at once I per-  
*ceive!* says he, ‘  
ing the death of a  
your distinguished  
at once conceive  
soldier—a *sabreur*  
a Frenchman.’ Th  
this way—quite qu  
the tears stood in h  
says he, ‘I would g  
I am silent; and he  
would make me hap  
to those who might  
then I say, ‘*Bien*—i  
to the commandan

the spot where our volunteer was buried, and to take with us such tools as we had to disinter the body. And it was done *comme il faut*. Somebody had marked the place with the iron part of a broken gun carriage,—wood is valuable, you will conceive—and there was no difficulty about it. ‘*Sapristie*,’ continued the sergeant, smoking fast, ‘I was working as hard as I could myself, with my stiff arm, and I did not take leisure to look round till we actually came upon the old bit of tent canvas which was round the body. It was little altered—wonderfully little. There was his fine, fierce countenance, yellow and sunken, no doubt, but staring open-eyed at the sky, just as it did when he was found after the charge. And *then*, I heard a groan and sobs behind me, and I did steal a glance at *milord*—*sacré bleu*! how pale he was, and the big tears running down his cheeks. Then, Antoine, he stepped forward from where he had been standing, and he knelt down, and raised the dead man’s face upon his knee, and kissed the brow—crushed as it was by the grape-shot. The body of course was given over to him, to do as he thought fit about its removal,—we could not help him there,—and he went off along with it the same evening in a steamer from Balaklava harbour. I took the liberty to ask the *milord*—who gave twenty napoleons to the troop—*un très bel homme*!—where the body would finally be interred, for we were all fond of the volunteer when he was alive, and interested in the romance of his friend’s coming to look for his remains, and he told me that it was to be taken across the sea to *milord*’s own home in *Angleterre*.’ ”

Such was the sergeant's story, and so it came to pass, that poor Basil's remains lay peacefully at last within the precincts of his comrade's home; in the old gray mausoleum where that comrade's own bones will come at the appointed hour to rest with them, side by side.

Sir Charles Maudesley's return, as if from the grave, had scarcely gained publicity, when, from all sides, a host of *quondam* friends flowed in to satisfy their curiosity and offer congratulations. Sundry relations of the family were among the number. "There were Colonel Maudesley of Skipsley Chase, General Maudesley, the Very Rev. Dr Maudesley, Dean of Diddlemuff; *cum multis aliis*, more or less distant in degree, and none of whom were essential to the thread of this narrative, nor possessed of sufficiently salient points of character to be valuable as accessories thereto. Of these, the gallant colonel was probably most interested in his recovered kinsman, he being heir to the baronetcy, though not, alas! to the estates, in the event of no son being left by the present holder of the same. Among the rest came, as soon as his tact would permit him, old Mr Wilmot, who had known and really valued Sir Charles in days gone by, and was, perhaps, more unaffectedly glad to welcome him back to the world than any of the throng. And he was one of the few whose presence and expressions of good-will were really acceptable to the object of them. The old gentleman grieved much over the hurried departure of Basil Thornfield, which had taken place before his visit to the hall.

"I have the whole story of the Malaga excursion from



"Frank," said he. "The boy appears to have been indebted for the saving of his life to that gallant fellow,—is it possible that I shall have no opportunity of thanking him—not as he deserves—that would be difficult—but I might at least ask him, if there is nothing a father can do in gratitude to the preserver of his only son!"

Sir Charles promised that Basil should not remain ignorant of the good old gentleman's feelings towards him.

"Not that he will expect anything of the sort; he would be ready to do the like again to-morrow, or at a moment's notice—but he never seems to realise the idea that he has conferred a benefit on a fellow-creature that could call for gratitude. God bless him!—brave, honest spirit,"—said the baronet, passing a hand rapidly across his brow.

"Amen!" sighed Mr Wilmot, "if such a prayer, sincerely offered up, be all I can do for him now."

Sir Charles Maudesley endured, and tried to receive graciously the thousand congratulatory visits which came fast one upon another, for the two or three weeks following. At last, he confessed his patience to be utterly exhausted. After the visit of Sir James Bellingham, whose society was not, however, displeasing to him, for the worthy admiral was a bluff honest seaman, and more what Sir Charles had been accustomed to than most of the others, the latter began to have serious thoughts of moving for a time elsewhere, just to let the conventional nine days' wonder elapse, and things settle back into the ordinary groove. Sir James was one of those who were sincerely glad to see Sir Charles, as an old friend restored from the world of

Sir Charles, while those for a time said nothing, occupied, and seemed disinclined in the matters which sprang up. But this was natural enough in an entirely novel mode of life. He, in infinite surprise, received at the eleventh hour that he purposed

said the baronet. "I can better do so when society has talked its fill about these mighty marvels; and our being together will give the lie to any scandal that might arise as to the terms upon which we stand. Your arrangements are nearly complete; *I* have none to make. In Heaven's name let us be off at once."

Was there no latent desire to draw nearer, at all events, to the stage whereon that drama was being played in which his soul yearned to join? However that may be, we know that he found his way there, and why it was he went. For months after he had completed that mournful expedition, Sir Charles Maudesley was an unhappy man. He did not return to his brother at Florence. He stayed at home, and sought to busy himself with the manifold concerns which were ready for his head and hand to work at. His activity was wonderful, his pursuit of the knowledge which was essential to his new position untiring—his charity and benevolence were inexhaustible. All dependent upon him blessed him—fervent as were their prayers, they could not bring him peace. He was constantly to be found pacing to and fro in the vicinity of the old gray mausoleum—often within its walls, and there was one murmur ever in his brain depriving him of rest. "Thornfield and Czernaski are gone; where shall I find friends to love me with a love like theirs?"

It was not known till afterwards that Sir Charles Maudesley had made strenuous efforts to obtain some employment connected with the British army in the East. He was unsuccessful—and, time working silently and steadily

we shake him cordially by the  
happiness, for by his own act  
he has resigned the faculty of  
visions incident to his rightful  
we join cordially, notwithstanding  
are freely bestowed upon him  
to whom he has extended a  
as the best blessing God can  
may never be wanting to fill

"But you have not come  
shrieks the young lady of the  
tioned; "the two lovers—  
Captain Wilmot—after news  
the hero and heroine once told  
book, you are surely not going  
us how they came to be united

"Really, my dear young  
the question—how they came  
as far as that goes, I am not  
them as lovers, and *par consequens*

"Well, well, if it will really be a satisfaction to you, ma'am, I don't mind referring you to the *Morning Post* of the ——th April, 185—, in which you will find it duly chronicled that, by the Very Rev. the Dean of Diddlemuff, assisted by the Rev. Harte Crusher, M.A., Lieutenant Colonel Francis Wilmot, V.C., of the Coldstream Guards, was, at St George's, Hanover Square, united to Geraldine, only daughter of Ralph Maudesley, Esq., of Stanton Wells, and niece of Sir Charles Maudesley, Bart., of Maudesley Hall, ——shire—will that do?"

"Well—um—yes—but"—

"Ah! I see—the same paper, just about a twelvemonth afterwards, adverts to certain rejoicings at Maudesley Hall, consequent upon the"—

"Hush, sir,—you are getting coarse again—I was not thinking of anything of the sort."

"By the by," breaks in a stout gentleman in a Welsh wig, who has hitherto rather preserved a show of not listening to the conversation—"what do you make of that half-French vagabond?—St Alban, do you call him? Was he actually brought to the guillotine? And his property—what became of that?"

"St Alban—he was no more half French than you are, sir—D'Estanges being quite a *nom de guerre*—no, sir; he was found stone dead in a corner of the saloon in the packet-boat on entering Boulogne harbour, with a small phial on the sofa beside him, and a smell of bitter almonds about his blue lips. The handcuffs had been removed, at his earnest request, during the voyage, and the French officer

your characters but you  
Maudesley."

"Ah! my dear madam,"  
corner, as having at last

"you are not one of those  
between the ROUGH and the

Kind reader, *Vale!*

THE



